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LOVERS' MEETING

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(Autobiography.)

LOVERS' MEETING

E L E A N O R S M I T H

Never on such a night have lovers met
Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

KEATS

HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers) LTD.
LONDON AND MELBOURNE

●

TO
HARRIET

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PROLOGUE • 1812

THE MAN AND the girl stood facing one another by the curtained windows. He held a candle, shielding the flame with his hand, for the room was cold, and dark, too ; it was a library, and appeared to have been long unused ; they stood thus in a blur of wavering light that for a moment became a little world remote from the dusky corners of the room wherein they stood, the room with its shelves of gloomy books, its dark furniture and massed shadows.

The only sound, for some moments after the young man had finished speaking, was the ticking of a grandfather clock, a sound so measured that the girl's voice seemed impetuous, almost distracted, when at last she answered her companion.

"I'll not be treated like a child ! Would a child have planned this meeting ?"

"This meeting ?" and he looked at her above the candle-flame, "yes, and when this meeting's discovered your ladyship will be sent to bed and I'll be thrown from the door like a dishonest servant. That's true enough, isn't it, or too near the truth for my liking, whatever it may be to yours !"

"You shall not call me your ladyship ! Soon, very soon, I'll begin to think you afraid !"

He held the candlestick so that the light struck his tilted eyes and high cheek-bones. His mouth was sulky.

"Afraid ? Of a pack of old wives' tales ?"

"Then put a light to the fire ! The book's here—hidden under my Cashmere."

He did not move, but he stared at her as he spoke.

"And then ? When we've lit the fire, and made the chimney smoke, and dislodged a few jackdaws' nests, and muttered

spells together? Rather an anti-climax, don't you think, when we return our separate ways? You to Madam Betty and her netting? Myself to the study, and terrestrial globes?" There was a pause, and he smiled, not without mockery. "I foresee a somewhat dismal dinner," he concluded, "not, I must confess, that that would be for me, personally, a new experience, but it might be devastating for a young lady of fashion. Besides, you'll catch cold."

"I wish," she said, in a coaxing tone, "that you knew how to play."

"My childhood, ma'am," the young man returned grimly, "was possibly of briefer duration than your own."

She said, softly:

"You didn't think me such a spoilt brat a week ago, by the stile near the wood. Did you?"

"If we must continue to converse in this mausoleum, for God's sake let's avoid personalities! So they gave you a witch, as a nurse, did they? I must confess I might have known it."

"Not a witch. The daughter of a Scottish spawwife. May we really not light the fire?"

"I suppose," said he, "that you were born to be humoured."

He knelt down by the fire-place.

"I like you best when you talk like that," she murmured.

The twigs began to crackle.

"Have you ever," he inquired, not looking at her, but still kneeling before the fire-place, "been crossed in all your life?"

"Many times. And most of all by you. Yet I continue to seek you out. So that must show——"

"We agreed to avoid personalities! If we're here to play witch and warlock then pray bring out your book of spells and we'll set to work. Or are *you* perhaps a little afraid of your own goblin fancies?"

She came to sit beside him on the hearthrug. The damp wood began to kindle, glowing with a buttercup light upon the dimity of her gown. The room itself, so long shut up and forgotten, woke slowly to a somewhat decaying reality. It was no longer a den of shadows; it was the damp, conventional

library of any eighteenth-century squire. Oak panelling, shelves of fusty, sober-looking volumes, faded, plum-coloured curtains, and a set of Hepplewhite chairs. Busts on the mantelpiece, a set of sporting-prints, a horse's hoof mounted as a paperweight upon the desk, a dusty Chinese fire-screen, and a ragged fox's brush.

She said disdainfully :

"This room stinks of neglect. That's why I chose it. No one ever comes here now."

"Don't be too nice ! After all, I must remind your ladyship that we're celebrating your birthday according to your own, or rather your nurse's decrees !"

"But," said she, "I didn't remember to bring apples. You should do that, on birthdays. And you wish !"

She tried to draw nearer to him, but he was too swift for her. He slid back on his heels.

"Ah !" he exclaimed, "your nurse—Juliet's nurse ! Let's have a portrait, ma'am, before we barter our immortal souls ! That's only fair ! Come now—was she tall, and witchy ? Did you quake, when she came near your cradle ?"

The girl shook her head. She was quite serious.

"No, she wasn't like that—you're mistaken. She was little, and round, and white-haired. Her cheeks were red and criss-crossed, like the picotees in the kitchen-garden. But she was what the Scots call 'fey.' She knew everything about the past, and the future, too."

"Let's concentrate only upon the future, if you've no objection ! And your magic book ? Did your nurse hide it at night beneath her mattress ?"

She held out her hands to the fire. She smiled, reminiscently. It was a secret smile, as though for the first time she forgot his presence beside her. Watching her beneath his lids, he knew himself forgotten, and his interest was pricked.

"No," she said at last, "that's wrong, too. The book wasn't hers. I found it here in the library. They shut me up one day for stealing William's mare. I found the book, and read part of it without understanding. A few days later we were out

in Pond Meadow—Nana and Francis and Peregrine and myself. The cowslips were in bloom, and Francis and I were making what Nana called a 'tossy-ball' out of the flowers. It was very warm, and the cowslips smelled of the sun. Then I saw beneath my feet a circle of toadstools, and I jumped inside it. I remembered what the book said about these elves' rings, and I sang the rhyme as I jumped about inside the circle—I was only twelve, remember—and then Nana pulled me outside, and boxed my ears. I could not understand why she was angry."

"Well?" he asked impatiently.

"She called me a wicked little changeling, and asked me where I got that verse. When I told her about the book, she was no longer angry, but she made me smuggle it up to the nursery. You see, she couldn't read, herself. For many nights I read it to her, and she said that I was a lucky one, because through her, and through the book, I might learn secrets that other women would sell their souls to know. She said that if I willed, I might cross time as other people cross the meadows."

He tried, rather unsuccessfully, to stifle a yawn.

"The secret of eternal youth? I'm afraid that doesn't interest me. Now, if it were the secret of eternal money . . ."

"Oh, money!" Her voice was scornful.

He stretched his long legs.

"There speaks the little rich girl to the stranger at her gate!"

"No, no." Her voice was urgent. "This—these spells tell more of juggling with lives, and places, of stepping, say, into King Arthur's kingdom, or into a Crusader's castle, or——"

"Sweet," he said, forgetting his decision to treat her with formality, "I'm not interested in the past! I hate the past—it's not worth muttering spells for! But the future! Now, if your book could only give us the future——"

"Our future, do you mean?"

"Since we're playing at fairy-tales, or birthdays, have it

your own way! But I must remind your ladyship that twenty years ago you'd have been burnt as a witch, wouldn't you?"

She said, rather as though mourning a friend:

"The eighteenth century's over. We're living in modern times. Don't forget that!"

"Modern times!" His voice was bitter. "I must confess I see nothing particularly enlightening about this precious epoch of ours! Misery, dirt, ignorance, squalor!"

She looked so astonished that he burst out laughing. There was no kindness in his laughter.

"I forgot," he declared, "that I was talking to a young lady of fashion. Sweet, you were brought up on bread and honey, cowslip-wine, and nightingales' tongues! When you dance at Devonshire House, your maids sprinkle gold-dust on your hair! Your pony's shod with silver, and his hay is buttered, and on moonlight nights you take a lily-pad as gondola and your gondoliers are frogs who wear his lordship's livery! No doubt, my pretty, you often sulk because you can't pull down the stars to make yourself a tiara! When you condescend to throw cake to beggars you laugh until your sides ache, watching them guzzle! You bathe in milk while children slave in darkness! In Brighton you dance above a pauper's burial-ground, and, if their wretched bones rattle beneath your feet, you're too busy flirting to notice! Why should you care?"

The fire leaped and crackled, throwing distorted shadows upon the red glare that now illuminated the walls.

"So I'm as bad as that, am I?"

She spoke with a dignity that he resented.

"As bad? You're worse, my dear! Look at you now—crouched in superstitious awe of Satan—a book of spells in your hand, like any peasant girl before her hearth!"

She threw her head back.

"That's not true!"

"What's not true?"

"That I'm in awe. I'm afraid of nothing! I love you,

as you know, and you told me, a few days ago, that you loved me, although, after what you've just said, it seems to me a sorry sort of loving. All the same, I would dare more for you than you would ever dare for me."

"I beg your ladyship's pardon for my discourtesy. Still, I must remind you, dear, that it's getting late, and that if we were discovered here, alone in the library even on your birthday, I'd be sent packing on the first coach. So——"

"You think I'm afraid of the future, don't you?" she asked, continuing to regard him steadily.

He smiled, and so far forgot himself as to take her hand.

"You're the princess of the fairy-tales, and I can only visualize you against your own decorative background!"

She snatched her hand away.

"How I hate you when you talk like that! Please—be serious a moment—do you think you would have been happier—would have had better opportunities in life—had you been born in the future?"

"After Boney's time? Of course! I might have had some chance, then."

She smiled. She could never be angry with him for long.

"Then we'll study my book?"

He turned to face her, sprawled on his elbow.

"I declare I'd forgotten your book."

He took it from her, and grimaced over the title.

"*A Dissertation on the Hidden People or Pharisees, who Dwell within Hills and Woods, and on their Diverse Spells . . .*"

He gave it back to her, and threw another log upon the fire.

"It's an old book, and probably valuable. Have you ever shown it to his lordship?"

She shook her head.

"No. William would only sell it. My nurse, whom you laugh at, thought that it was written when Gloriana, as she called her, was Queen of England."

"Unlikely," said he, and then: "Come—aren't you going to evoke the future? Will there be much brimstone?"

The fire was already burning in a crimson fury. Its light

blazed upon their young faces as though determined to cast them in diabolic mould. The flames slanted their eyes, curved their lips, and shadowed their cheek-bones. Beneath this fierce brilliance the most innocent glances became passionate. It was difficult, then, for the young man to remember what he thought of as his place.

"Hurry," he said impatiently.

"You really want the future?"

"Of course. I may wake up to drive my own curric!e!"

And he laughed. The fire-light distorted his mirth into the smile of a satyr.

She opened the book and put her finger on the yellow page.

She asked:

"When we've finished saying it, how shall we know if it's really happened?"

He found the seriousness of her superstition charming. He glanced beneath his lashes at her dark head, bent over the book, at the ivory of her young breasts swelling above the muslin gown that was dappled with flickering firelight. The shape of her thigh was discernible beneath the thin stuff. It was monstrous that she should be shut away with him when he might not so much as touch her. He shivered.

"Hurry," he said again.

"Whatever happens, we'll always be friends?"

Friends! He did not in the least want to be her friend.

"Yes," he shrugged.

"When we've finished saying the spell, we'll go across to the windows and pull the curtains."

"Why?"

"Just to see if something's happened."

"What do you mean?"

"The park might no longer be there. A whole new world might lie outside this house. Whatever it is, we won't be afraid of it, will we?"

"Afraid—of the future? I'm only afraid of the present!"

She, who was happy in the present, knew no way of consoling

him, and she attached, despite his mockery, little enough faith to her nurse's spells.

"Anything would be better than this," he observed curtly. He added: "They might have iron horses! Make haste!"

"What a fantastical idea! Please come a—little closer, while I read, for you make me feel nervous."

"I'd as soon stay where I am."

She said suddenly, looking straight into the fire:

"I love you very much, you know. No matter what may happen after to-night, I would like you to know that."

He said nothing.

"You see," she stammered, "if a spell really happened, we might—we might be separated. That's why I wanted to tell you."

He muttered something about her being as superstitious as a savage. Then he turned on his side. He could no longer endure to look at her. There was no need, he thought, for any further enchantment, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to keep his place.

"Read," he commanded, harshly.

Obediently, she began to read from the old book that had been written when Gloriana reigned. Her eyes were bent upon the page, and his were closed, the better to keep this place of his. If the fire burned blue, neither one noticed.

The wind was high, outside; it was a blustering April night, and if a rumble, louder than that of a hundred coaches, echoed outside the shuttered windows, neither one paid any attention. The aeroplane passed, unnoticed.

For a moment, an hour, a century, they were conscious only of one another.

Then, when the fire burned low, and the candle-flicker sighed, dying, it seemed that the room itself had grown very dim.

It had disappeared, and they were in darkness.

PART ONE • 1934

CHAPTER I

VENICE IN JULY.

George Henry Charles, Viscount Barradale, dug his spoon into a striped ice and continued, somewhat abstractedly, to write a love-letter.

He had returned early from the Lido with this purpose in view. He had eaten two ices, seated the while outside Florian's, and now a faint chill in the air, combined with the sudden sound of voices on the Piazza, told his subconscious mind that the sun was down and that he might, with impunity, order himself a drink.

He waved to the waiter and commanded a Martini cocktail. He was writing to his fiancée. He desired her greatly, but he did not wish to marry. He had, however, accustomed himself, during the last two years, to the idea of marriage, which is to say that, although not enthusiastic, he was resigned. In any case, Isabel, he knew, would have nothing to do with him unless he married her, and he wanted Isabel more than any woman he had ever known.

She was two years older than himself, she had no money, and his father disliked the idea of their marriage, but they had been officially engaged for six months, and they were to marry before Christmas. Whenever this idea occurred to George, which was frankly seldom, it depressed him. He even knew where he was going for his honeymoon. He was going to Palm Beach and to Jamaica. It was not the honeymoon itself that upset him—it was the thought of what happened after-

wards, for he could conceive of no more delightful experience than that of a West Indian cruise in Isabel's company.

If only—he thought for the hundredth time—he could have known that he would say good-bye to Isabel once they landed in England. He recollected a popular song :

“Thanks for the memory. . . .”

Why could not Isabel have been content to thank him for a memory ?

Marriage !

He sipped his cocktail and continued his letter. He had, he observed with pleasure, filled two closely-written pages with terms of affectionate endearment. He could now afford to write of general topics.

He took up his pen.

Many people, wandering about the Piazza, turned to look at him, and, to do him justice, he was unconscious of their scrutiny. Perhaps, however, he was used to it, for George Barradale was a handsome young man. He was six feet tall, and he was lucky enough to possess broad shoulders and a slim waist. He was burned chestnut-brown—most obligingly to match his hair—and his eyes were blue as dark sapphires. They slanted so as to give him what several foolish women had described as a faun-like look, and his mouth was full and well-shaped. The bone of his face was exceptionally clear and good, and such weakness as there was expressed itself, gracefully enough, in his chin and jaw-bone. He looked, in fact, like a superior film-star, and his father, the sardonic Lord Herries, was fond of saying that, had he been a woman, he would have been good-looking. No one could ever have made a similar comment about Lord Herries himself, and Barradale was far from being effeminate. Like most young men of fashion, holidaying on the Mediterranean, he looked his best in the shabby blue garments of a French peasant.

Dislodging a pigeon from his table, he continued to write to Isabel.

“I get rather sick of the Lido, and of those baked brown bodies belonging to so many of our friends. A lot of them turn

red instead of brown, and then the beach looks like a butcher's shop, and then I leave it. I'm not painting at the moment, but I can always slip off somewhere to look at pictures. That's why I love Venice. I've made enough studies, however, to keep me busy all the winter."

Here he paused, recollecting that he was to be married before Christmas. He frowned, and ejected another pigeon. Quite frequently he found himself between the devil and the deep sea. The devil was his father's dislike of his profession, and the deep sea was Isabel's insistence on marriage.

Lord Herries disliked any artist uncommissioned by himself, and his fury when his only son had adopted painting as a profession was still, to George, an unpleasing recollection. He did not know that Isabel found it almost as distasteful. She had agreed, in private conference with his father, not to break this news until after the marriage. It was then decided, between the two of them, that George was to enter politics. Herries and Isabel disliked one another intensely, but they had made a pact, so to speak, regarding George's future. He was, they fervently agreed, to become a gentleman, which is to say that his easels and palette were to be thrown into the gutter.

The victim himself was, needless to say, unaware of these projects.

He ordered another cocktail, and continued to write steadily. He could not help but feel that his letter was becoming increasingly dull.

"I have just," he scrawled, "shoved two overfed pigeons off my table. One of them had only one leg."

He stopped.

He did not really imagine that Isabel was interested in pigeons.

He glanced round at the exquisite pillars of the square, at the jewel that was St. Mark's, at the crowds of people, and at the cloud of grey beating wings in the air above his head. Isabel might have been here with him, but she had refused. She had so many things to do. After all, she said, they would be together for ever after Christmas, and that was the remark

which had so much frightened him. He did not think that he wanted to be with anyone for ever.

He lit a cigarette, and began again.

"At the next table a man has suddenly appeared who looks rather like King Charles II. I bet he's got a drop of Stuart blood. With him is a rather attractive little girl in a yellow dress. I'd like to paint her as——"

At this moment a breeze impolitely rose and blew Lord Barradale's letter across to the table he had so recently been describing.

He sprang up to retrieve it, but quick as he was, the gentleman who resembled King Charles II was quicker.

"Thank you so much," George said.

"I think there's another page under the table," the stranger remarked.

The girl dived in search of it.

"How very kind of you!"

He stuffed the pages into his pocket and returned to his table. Then an idea occurred to him.

"Will you have a drink?" he called to the stranger.

"I'd be delighted."

George went across to the other table, where he ordered a whisky for the man and a striped ice for the little girl.

"I think you must be Lord Barradale?" the stranger suggested affably.

"I am. But where did we meet?"

"We've never met. But I fancy I've seen photographs of you in the illustrated papers. My name's Forest—Captain Sholto Forest. This is my daughter, Martina."

George was by no means displeased with his new acquaintance.

Forest must at one time have been a magnificent figure of a man. He was about forty-five, tall, broad-chested, and swarthy-skinned. He radiated vitality and health. He was as dark as any Spaniard. When he smiled, which was often, he showed brilliant teeth. His lips were unusually red, and if there were heavy pouches beneath his eyes, the eyes them-

selves, slate-grey in colour, were clear as glass. Apart from a slight protuberance of stomach Forest might have been in the early thirties. He had beautiful, well-kept hands with long, tapering fingers.

The girl, Martina, George dismissed as being about fourteen. She was very slender. Her curly, silky hair was dark, with glints of bronze, and fell in waves almost to her shoulders. It was untidy, and the wind had blown an elf-lock over her eyes. When she pushed it away he knew why he had idly thought of painting her as a childish Spanish dancer. She was not at all like her father, although the apricot bloom of her sun-flushed cheeks could scarcely have been more southern; it was the combination, with her, of vivid green eyes beneath black brows, and of a red, full-lipped mouth that was not a child's; these had at once reminded him of some half-forgotten painting by Zuluaga. In contrast to the father's well-cut, pin-stripe suit there was something of the peasant in his daughter's yellow cotton garment. She was bare-legged, with rope-soled sandals. Peasant, again. But she would probably grow up into a pretty girl.

"How long are you staying in Venice?" asked Captain Forest, lighting a fat, expensive-looking Egyptian cigarette. His voice was deep and warm.

George said, with perfect truth, that he had no idea.

"I'm by way of being a painter," he explained. "I swim in the morning, and come back from the Lido every afternoon to wander about with a sketch-book."

"It sounds pleasant enough," Forest agreed, "so long as your party understand that you like going off on your own. But that's often a difficulty."

"I haven't got a party. I'm alone here." He thought of Isabel, not without annoyance, and turned to the girl beside him. "Have another ice?"

"No, thank you."

Her voice was warm, like her father's. She spoke English perfectly, but the timbre of her voice was not English. They were a puzzling couple, and they interested him.

"Are you staying here or at the Lido?" he asked his new acquaintance.

Forest insisted upon ordering two more drinks. When he had succeeded in attracting the waiter's attention he explained:

"At the moment we've got a flat about ten minutes from here. It's small, and very hot, but Martina likes it, and we may stay on for a few weeks. Mayn't we, my dear?"

"We may stay on all the summer," volunteered the young girl, in her velvety woman's voice.

"Tell them to bring some ice and to look sharp," Forest commanded her, speaking more rapidly than before.

She turned her head to address the nearest waiter in a torrent of fluent Italian.

"I envy you that accomplishment," George told her.

"Martina's mother was Neapolitan," Forest explained, in lazy tones, "she's a good linguist, and should be—she's been brought up all over Europe."

"Don't you live in England?"

"I haven't for some years—can't stand the climate. I had a house in Capri until recently, but I had to give it up." He added, with his charming smile: "The worst type of English will insist on settling there!"

"And so you wander about wherever you please?"

"More or less," Forest agreed, tapping the ash from his cigarette. He stretched his long legs under the table.

George was silent.

He thought, with some bitterness, of his own existence. His father's house in Hill Street. His own studio in Glebe Place. Camelos, the house in Oxfordshire that would one day belong to him. Worse—the house in Cheyne Walk that was to be his father's wedding-gift. There he was to live with Isabel. He stared, for a moment dismayed, as though at an endless vista of houses, and then turned to the sun-burnt nomads beside him. Wanderers, these. They stayed only long enough to please themselves. They were not weighed

down by possessions. They were free. Suddenly he encountered Martina's green gaze. Her expression seemed to him curiously ironical in one so young.

"You'd like that, too?" she suggested.

"I'd like it quite a lot."

"But, my dear Lord Barradale," Forest exclaimed, "surely of all people in the world you can do exactly as you please?"

George frowned.

"Scarcely. My father likes me about the place. His health isn't too good, and I'm responsible for keeping an eye on Camelos. Then there's my work, which I take rather seriously, and then, you see, I'm going to be married at Christmas."

"Of course," Forest said, lighting another cigarette, "now I know where I saw your photograph. I remember reading about your engagement."

Martina was no longer paying any attention to their conversation. She held a piece of cake in her hand and a pigeon balanced on her wrist, pecking greedily. The swirl of his wings blew another lock of hair across her forehead.

"Listen," said George to his new friend, "I suppose you wouldn't dine with me to-night?"

Forest smiled.

"I'd prefer it if you dined with us."

"Another night, if you like. But it would be a kindness, if you'd be my guest this evening."

"Martina!" Forest called.

She turned, and the pigeon flapped away.

"Do you hear that Lord Barradale has most kindly invited us to dinner?"

George was somewhat taken aback. It had not occurred to him to include Martina in the invitation. He had no particular wish for the company of a *jeune fille*.

"I hope you'll come," he said with such warmth as he could muster.

"It would be lovely," she answered casually.

"Then that's settled," George declared.

"I must tidy myself," Martina told her father, glancing at him beneath her eyelashes.

"By all means. And you might let them know, at the flat, will you?"

She nodded, getting up from the table.

"Would you like my gondola?" George inquired, rising courteously.

Her face sparkled.

"Have you really got a gondola of your own?"

"She's a nice child," George decided, at the sight of that transfigured face. Aloud, he said:

"No, I'm sorry to say it's only hired. But it's at your service. It's outside Danieli's, and——"

"Then I'm afraid I don't want it. The flat's only two streets away from the Piazza."

"Hurry, darling," her father suggested.

"Very well."

She disappeared into the crowd.

"Great responsibility, a motherless girl," the Captain confided.

"Motherless?"

"My wife died when she was four."

"She looks Spanish, your daughter. Perhaps that comes from you?"

"Not that I know of," Forest smiled, "although I'm a Cornishman. But that's the Sicilian blood—Martina's grandmother was Sicilian. The Saracen and Moorish influence is pretty dominating. Have another drink?"

●

CHAPTER II

MARTINA FOREST CLIMBED the stone stairs, let herself in at the door, and advanced into a living-room heaped with bright cushions, vivid with Bokhara rugs pinned casually upon the walls, hot, stuffy with fumes of stale smoke, and carelessly dusted.

A sharp feminine voice called :

" Sholto ! Where have you been ? "

" It's not Sholto. It's Martina."

Mrs. Paradise, who had been reclining upon the sofa, sat up abruptly. She was a short, stout woman with a frizz of dyed scarlet hair, blue, piercing eyes, and a wrinkled, painted face which resembled nothing so much as a pink fondant that has been left too long in the shop-window.

" Where's your father ? "

" We're dining out. On business."

" Do you mean I'm to be left alone again ? "

Martina walked across to the window.

Outside, the narrow, crooked streets crawled like rat-alleys down to the dank waters of an obscure canal. A scum of refuse floated down the waters, and a stray cat licked its sores in the street below. Venice, to Martina, was far from beautiful. She turned away from the window.

Mrs. Paradise repeated her question in a louder voice.

" I tell you, it's business," Martina replied. She added, struck by a sudden idea : " Annic—if only you had a dress, an evening-dress, that would fit me ! Have you such a thing ? "

" Don't be a little fool ! Who's your father dining with ? "

" You should know these things. A young man—Lord Barradale."

Mrs. Paradise sprang up from the sofa. She wore an emerald silk blouse and a bright blue skirt. Her fat feet were crammed into painful, stunted patent-leather pumps, and there was a ladder in her stocking.

"Barradale! Where'd he find him?"

The girl explained, pulling her cotton frock over her head.

"Then why the hell," Mrs. Paradise demanded, "haven't I been asked too?"

Martina went into the bathroom and turned on the taps. The bath looked rather like one of Barradale's discarded palettes.

Mrs. Paradise followed her to the door, shouting louder.

"Do you hear what I said?"

Martina retorted, above the hissing taps:

"You're a fortune-teller, aren't you? Look in your crystal, and find out why you haven't been asked! How should I know?"

She got into the bath.

The woman continued to storm.

"I'm about sick of keeping you and your father! Do you hear? Whose flat is this? I'll pack you out to-morrow, you and that shiftless ne'er-do-well, too! I suppose the truth of the matter is, he doesn't think me good enough for his lordship Viscount Barradale!"

She flung herself back into the living-room and Martina heard the splash of whisky poured into a glass.

Ten minutes later the girl came back from her bedroom wearing a shabby black dress with a black Venetian shawl.

"Annie! Will you do me a favour?"

"I'll see you in hell first," the fortune-teller declared sullenly. She was lying on the sofa smoking an amber cigarette, a glass of whisky cradled in her fat hands.

"Listen," Martina pleaded, "you always say that sometimes, once in a while, you really are psychic . . . tell me if Barradale will bring us luck? We need it, don't we?"

"You'll need it when I throw you out, all right. And that, my girl, will be soon enough."

"Is he very rich?"

"Old Herries—that's his pa—is lousy with money. Why doesn't Sholto bring the boy round here for a séance—that's what I'd like to know?"

"He's going to be married."

"So much the better."

"Is she beautiful, the lady he's engaged to?"

"What's it to do with you?" Then, with the parrot memory of her kind: "Isabel Cope . . . Colonel's daughter—used to be on the stage. Then she was secretary to some film company. Good marriage for her. She's got looks, but no money. And she's no virgin, if you ask me. One of the lucky ones, I should say."

"And Lord Barradale?"

The fortune-teller poured herself another whisky.

"Rich young mug. Make Sholto bring him here for a séance to-morrow."

"No. You're wrong. He's not a mug. At least, not like some of them. Has he often been photographed for the papers?"

"They all have," Mrs. Paradise retorted contemptuously; "that smart set never stop advertising themselves."

"Then that's why I know his face. I'll give Father your message if I have a chance."

"You'd better—if you want to keep a roof over your head!"

When Martina joined the others they wandered down some narrow streets to dine at the Taverna beneath a roof of vines to the accompaniment of a Neapolitan orchestra. They ate shell-fish and drank golden wine. Not far away water splashed against stone steps. The vine above their heads was studded with fairy lamps.

George felt extraordinarily happy.

He had always disliked eating by himself. Now, with his new friend, or rather friends, Venice once more enchanted him. Captain Forest drank heavily, but the wine seemed incapable of affecting him. He was genial, charming, and

courteous. Yet, somehow, he made the worldly Barradale feel young and crude. It seemed to George that Forest, without admitting as much, was the world's most experienced, sophisticated inhabitant. It was easy to dismiss Forest as a gypsy, a wanderer, a man without a home or roots. But Forest, he felt, despised such ties. Forest was big enough to despise them.

He said to George, laughing and showing his big teeth :

"So you're really going to get married? You're young enough for me to ask, without impertinence, how old you are?"

"Twenty-five," George told him.

"*Must* you?" Forest asked, smiling ruefully over the rim of his glass.

"I certainly must, now!"

"If I'd known you before, I'd have begged you not to marry before you were forty. And I know what I'm talking about. I married when I was twenty-nine."

"Of course," George agreed, "there's Martina to prove it."

He raised his glass to her.

"Exactly," Forest grinned, "and I may tell you that when I married, Martina's mother was a nun, or as good as a nun. She was a postulant."

Here Martina, that thin child in the shabby black dress, surprised George considerably.

She said furiously to Forest, her eyes as green as emeralds :

"You leave my mother out of the conversation!"

"The modern daughter!" Forest shrugged, raising his eyebrows.

George knew that he was a little drunk, and he plunged.

"Martina," he said, "you ought to be better-tempered! After all, you're listening to your national music. Isn't that a tarantella?"

Forest got up, to telephone, he said.

George found himself left alone with Martina. She was still apricot-flushed, but her black lashes hung upon her cheeks. Her red mouth was sulky.

"I think," he teased, "that you're a bad child. You've got one of the most charming fathers I've ever known, and as far as I can make out, you don't particularly appreciate him. Now——"

She interrupted him.

"You're going to the Lido to-night, aren't you?"

He was surprised.

"The Lido? Why should I go there?"

"To the Casino. To gamble."

"What on earth makes you think that?"

"I supposed it was arranged," she answered indifferently.

"I'm going to paint you, one day," George announced.

"One day? That's too late, one day. We may go away quite soon."

"I see—you'd disdain to sit to me. Is that it?"

She smiled, then.

"Now it's you who are being silly."

"I'm going to paint you with coloured gypsy combs in your hair and a flowered shawl. Have you ever been in Spain?"

"Yes. I've lived in Barcelona and in Madrid and in the Canaries."

"Is there anywhere you haven't lived?"

"I haven't lived very much in England. Are you going to have a grand wedding?"

"Would you like an invitation?"

She shook her head fiercely. Her dark locks tossed like Medusa's serpents.

"I was being serious," she told him.

"So was I. Wouldn't you like to come to my wedding?"

She frowned, concentrating.

"I like you better as you are," she produced at length.

George burst out laughing.

"Tell the waiter to bring some more wine," he said at length. "This calls for more wine," he told her.

"Oh, if you like . . ."

"D'you think I'm drunk?"

"It's not my affair if you are."

"Little girls like you should be at school," George told her pompously.

"I have been at school. For two years I was at a convent in Naples."

"And I suppose you consider yourself grown up now?"

"I am more grown up than you, I think. Here's your wine."

At this moment Forest returned.

He said to Martina in rapid Italian :

"She's all right. But you'd better go back."

George understood, and tipsy as he was, was puzzled.

"*Bene*," Martina said impatiently. She turned her back and listened to the orchestra.

"Are you coming to the Lido?" Forest inquired of his host.

"The Lido? Why?"

"There's a boat in fifteen minutes. I think I'll go and have a look at the Casino."

"It's a hell of a long way to go."

"You get a breath of fresh air," Forest smiled.

"I wouldn't mind that."

"In any case, it's my daughter's bedtime. Martina! You must be off."

"She can't go by herself," George objected.

"Can't she!" Forest laughed. "She's an independent little creature, and she knows Venice like her pocket. In any case, we'll put her on her way."

Five minutes later Martina said to George on the Piazza, like a colourless convent girl :

"Good night, Lord Barradale. And thank you very much for dinner."

Then she was gone, swallowed in a crowd of women wearing black dresses and black shawls.

.

In a private room of the Lido Casino an olive-skinned man said to his chief :

"Forest's here again, sir."

"Then throw him out."

"Lord Barradale's here to vouch for him."

"You mean the Viscount Barradale, son of the Earl of Herries? Has he his passport?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then let Forest in!"

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CHAPTER III

GEORGE WOKE LATE, at Danieli's. His head ached, and he felt not only sleepy, but stupid. Then he remembered. He had ordered champagne at the Casino, he had shared a bank with Captain Forest, and they had won a certain amount of money. He picked up his note-case and found it stuffed with five thousand unexpected *lire*. Forest, he decided, had been lucky to him.

Burying his head beneath the pillows, he tried to remember more about his evening. It seemed to him that he had talked frankly to Forest about his engagement, and Forest had told him not to be a fool.

"Life's so short, Barradale, and you're only young once. No man should marry before he's forty. . . ."

Forest and that little green-eyed devil of a girl! It seemed to George that they were the only people he had ever known to whom he might speak his mind. They had a charm that astonished him. He thought them the only free people he had ever known. They would do, these two, only what pleased them. They enjoyed a liberty so sweet that it was strange, like something enchanted, and to him they were players in some drama of which he must forever remain a spectator. He supposed that when they had stayed long enough in Venice they would leave for Budapest, or Geneva, or Rome, or Monte Carlo. There they would camp, with their few casual belongings, until the days became short, and once more it was time to travel in search of the sun. They would not have known what to do with a home, had they possessed one.

Of all people he had ever known, they were the ones who seemed to mock his future most. He included the girl, Martina, in his reflections. She had said little, and she was, to him,

a brat, but she was as wild, or wilder, than her father. Her freedom, to him, seemed exquisite—like that of some savage delicate animal. He supposed that one day, when she grew up, some man would civilize her, and then half her charm would vanish.

For the first time, then, he remembered Isabel, and his half-finished letter, that had been interrupted by the Forests. By the Forests and by the wind.

He wondered what Isabel would think of these new vagabond friends.

His head continued to ache, but he resolutely climbed from his bed. A swim would make him feel better. So much better that, after lunch, he would finish his letter to Isabel.

.

A conference was taking place in the Forest flat. Forest himself lay upon the sofa. He wore a rich, faded dressing-gown, and he was unshaven. He smoked incessantly.

Mrs. Paradise sat facing him. She wore a young girl's dress of bunchy pink gingham. Her scarlet curls were frizzed, and already she sipped her whisky. Martina sat on the window-seat. She wore fisher-boy's trousers and a raspberry-pink shirt.

"I don't see why you're squawking, Annie," Forest said. "After all, five thousand lire's not to be sneezed at."

"It's all I've had from you for three weeks. And, after all, I'm paying the rent of this flat, if I may make so bold as to remind you."

Forest grinned.

"Martina, are these our marching-orders?"

"I only wish they were," retorted Martina from the window.

He said, coaxingly, to Mrs. Paradise:

"You know, young Barradale's taken quite a fancy to Martina?"

Mrs. Paradise laughed, rudely and sarcastically.

Martina said:

"If I had some pretty clothes, that might be true, although I don't think so. But I haven't anything."

"Don't be a fool, Sholto," Mrs. Paradise told him. "If you knew Isabel Cope, you'd save your breath. *She's* a beauty."

"To hell with Isabel Cope!" said Forest, lightly. "What time is it, Tina?"

She put her head out of the window.

"Eleven, by St. Mark's."

"Then take your bathing-things and cut down to the Lido. Ask for Barradale's cabin. I fixed that last night."

"Fixed what?"

"I told Barradale last night you hadn't anywhere to swim. He said you could share his cabin on the beach. So get a move on."

"I won't go."

Forest raised himself on the sofa cushions.

"Annie, get me a whisky and then get out. I would like a private conversation with my daughter."

Annie brought him the whisky.

"What I want to know is, why can't you bring this fellow in for a séance?"

"Get out, Annie, get out. . . ."

Martina fixed her eyes on a cabinet of paperweights near the door. They were emerald-green, and flowers blossomed miraculously amongst their crystal bubbles. She knew just what was coming, and she felt a little sick.

"Tina," her father said softly, "you're not going to muck everything up, are you, my sweet?"

"Everything? What's everything? I can't see we've got anything, myself."

"Do you know that Barradale likes you?"

"He likes you, too. Why pick on me?"

Forest looked thoughtfully into his glass.

He said:

"He likes us both. Why shouldn't he? We're new experiences to a playboy. We're nomads—everything romantic. . . . I made five thousand lire with him last night—on the level, too. Well, no brat of mine's going to spoil the market. So get out to the Lido and play with him. Don't forget the

play, either. Do what you damn well please—but keep him out there until lunch-time. I'll try and make it. Do you hear ? ”

“ I thought the begging-letter racket was over,” Martina replied.

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I mean when I was little, in London. When you dragged me everywhere as a shell-shocked officer's orphan daughter. When you were supposed to be looking for your lost wife. You made plenty over that.”

Forest put down his glass on a table beside the sofa.

“ You're a helpful little pet, aren't you ? ”

“ I've helped you all my life.”

“ I sent you to school in Naples, didn't I ? Do you think I did that for nothing ? ”

“ You never did anything for nothing.”

“ I've beaten you before, Martina. Do you want me to beat you again ? ”

She looked at him sullenly, and said :

“ You're not going to beat me any more. I'm not afraid of you any longer. You shan't bully me ever again—I'm not my mother ! ”

“ You need a whip,” Forest told her gently.

She said nothing.

“ A whip, Martina, to slash you with blood and bruises. Unfortunately, if I beat you as I'd like to, you couldn't swim with Barradale. A pity ! Because I'd take infinite pleasure, in beating you, this morning.”

Martina remained silent.

She thought, at that moment, of many things that were past. The house in Capri, and her father's debts. The convent-school in Naples, from which she was eventually removed because the bills remained too long unpaid. A trip to Monte Carlo and a bad cheque at the Casino. Then London, with what she thought of as the begging-letter racket. Spain, and a gypsy dancer who kept her father until she found him unfaithful. Austria, and Hungary, with an American woman to

pay the bill. Nice, and a speculation that failed. Switzerland, where he acted as a tourist's guide. Paris, where he was manager of a low cabaret. Capri again, a poker scandal, and flight. Venice, with a drunken fortune-teller keeping the pair of them.

"I shan't stay with you much longer," she declared suddenly, frowning.

Forest smiled. To those who did not know him it was a broad, radiant, schoolboy's grin. But Martina knew him.

"While you're under age," said he, gaily, "you'll have to stay with me. And that's quite a long time, you know! Yes, quite a long time. Afterwards, if you want to go on the streets, I agree—there's no one to stop you! Meanwhile, Barradale's alone on the Lido. Do you really object to joining him?"

Martina said, to her own surprise:

"You might let him alone!"

Forest lit another of his expensive cigarettes.

"Let him alone! Are you crazy?"

"He's going to be married," she reminded him.

"He isn't married yet, is he? Now, if you were a few years older, and a thought more voluptuous . . . you look such a child still, although your worldly knowledge is doubtless superior to his own. However——"

"I'm not going to the Lido."

Forest walked across to her. He was still smiling. With the flat of his hand he smacked her face deliberately. The blow left a flame of red on her cheek-bone. He laughed, rocking gently upon his heels.

"That's my girl. That's my nice, affectionate, obedient little daughter!"

Her eyes were narrowed and ice-green.

"Do you believe in reincarnation?"

"An unexpected question," he laughed, "I never thought much about it."

"Nor did I. But there must be such a thing. One couldn't only be born your daughter—that would be too bad a break! There must be a second chance somewhere!"

"My dear, it's nearly twelve ! You'll miss the boat."

"Very well. I'll go and meet him. And I only hope you'll do something to him you'll be sent inside for. That's what I hope."

"If I do," said Captain Forest, "after our conversation this morning, I'll drag you into Borstal behind me. Is that a bargain ?"

Mrs. Paradise, sniffing, came back into the room. He turned on her in a fury.

"What are you doing here ? I didn't send for you, did I ?"

"I happen," proclaimed Mrs. Paradise, looking exactly like a ginger-coloured Pekinese, "to be paying the rent of this flat. Or perhaps you'd rather take on the responsibility . . . that's just exactly what I want to talk to you about."

Martina fled.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE, REPOSING UPON a raft, scarcely recognized the Forest child when he saw her. Clad in a scanty black bathing suit, her wet hair plastered to her head, he thought her a grown woman until, hearing that warm, rather husky voice, he recognized her.

Her presence, just then, gave him no pleasure.

"My father said it was all right for me to use your cabin. I'm very sorry if it isn't. Is this your raft?"

"No. It's just anybody's."

"Then that's all right."

She swung herself on to the raft. It was impossible not to realize, then, that she was older than he had supposed. He glanced, balefully, at her bronzed limbs, and even more balefully at her young breasts, thrusting against the black of her brief suit. Her breasts were like apples. He rolled sulkily upon his side. Once upon a time, when he was very young, apples had meant as much to him as birthday cake, or rockets on the Fifth of November, but he could not even remember why. He lay blinking in the sun, absorbed in dim memories, but he still could not imagine, after ten minutes' sun-baked reverie, why apples had ever meant anything to him in the days of his childhood.

He looked over his shoulder and saw that the girl was lying quietly on the edge of the raft, her fingers dabbling in the water. Her wet hair was drying, fluffy in the sun. It was blown across her neck, and he could see where the sunburn ended. Watching her, he became a painter pure and simple. Her body was more beautiful than that of any nymph. She, who was so slender in her peasant frocks became, naked,

something infinitely more mature. A little girl, dressed, she seemed in her bathing-suit the incarnation of every desirable woman. But her back was turned.

"Martina!" he called suddenly.

She sat up, swiftly, and was a child again.

"I can't quite make out," George observed, "what you're doing here?"

"No more can I," she said, her hair falling over her eyes, "but apparently you told my father I could bathe with you. I'm very sorry—I don't want to disturb you."

"Don't be silly! Are you alone here?"

"Yes."

She sounded sulky.

"So am I."

She said nothing.

George forgot the painter. The lovely lines of her body no longer appealed to him. This was Martina, the little daughter of his friend. His new friend, who preached freedom.

"Is your father coming here for lunch?"

"I don't know. Perhaps."

"You don't seem to care, one way or the other. Do you?"

She said seriously:

"I left my things in your cabin. I left them in a very tidy heap. But I wish I hadn't. I knew you'd forget you asked me to bathe."

"You're presuming I was drunk, last night?"

"Why shouldn't you be?" she asked indifferently. Her lack of interest was colossal.

George declared, stung:

"You're the most impertinent brat I ever met in all my life!"

She looked really disconcerted.

"I'm sorry. I'm really very sorry! I forgot."

"Forgot what?"

She hesitated.

"Everything. I forgot you were engaged."

"What on earth has that got to do with it?"

She stared at him, and smiled, uncertain. Then, as though

perplexed, she slid into the sea. He followed, but she was a fast swimmer. She reached the beach before he did.

"Martina!"

"Can I change in the cabin?"

"Yes—if you hurry. And if you'll lunch with me. Will you?"

"My father may be coming down."

"What does that matter? We'll all lunch together."

As he stood waiting, a pink, naked-looking young man approached him.

"How are you?"

"Very well," said George, who did not in the least recollect him.

"Isabel here?"

"No. I wish she were. She's in London."

"What a pity! I'm here for a weekly paper, you know. I'd like a photograph of you. And that attractive girl—who is she?"

"Oh, she's only a child. I hardly know her. Another time——"

Martina came out of the cabin.

"Look, just take her arm—I won't keep you a second!"

George turned white with anger, while Martina, more tactful than he could have supposed, slipped quickly backwards as the camera clicked.

George walked straight into the cabin.

"Come to lunch," he said coldly, five minutes afterwards.

Martina followed him meekly.

Although it was too early for the Lido 'season' the gay beach restaurant was crowded with elegant, half-naked men and women. The fact that she was lunching alone with the best-looking young man on the beach did nothing to restore her self-confidence, for he muttered something about 'damned photographers' and continued to look very arrogant indeed. He beckoned imperiously to the head-waiter, and she found herself sitting at a reserved table.

"Do you lunch here every day?" she asked in awe.

"Depends what I feel like. How about some melon?"

Martina ordered melon, chicken, and ice-cream.

"What a comfort," he exclaimed suddenly, "to lunch with a woman who isn't dieting!"

She turned scarlet with the pleasure of being described as a woman by this god-like being.

She had never before met anyone with such easy self-confidence. Even her father's suave manner now seemed florid compared to the divine simplicity of Barradale's assurance. She tried to imagine him against his own English background. She did not know her own country so well as she knew other lands, but she thought of him as surrounded by ancestral turrets, striding Highland moors, driving down Piccadilly in a long, sleek car. She wondered whether he went to Ascot in a grey top-hat. It was impossible to imagine him travelling in crowded buses, standing in a tube, or eating his dinner in a Lyons restaurant.

"What are you thinking about?" her host suddenly demanded.

She answered quickly:

"This restaurant! Do you know the Hôtel de Paris in Monte Carlo?"

"I know it well. Why?"

"I've never been inside it, and I've always wanted to. Some time ago, when I was little, my father used to go for hours into the old Casino, and I played games all day in the Casino gardens. At least, I was supposed to play, and I was given sandwiches to eat in case my father didn't come back for lunch. But I didn't play. I used to watch the people going in and out of the Hôtel de Paris and think I'd give anything to see inside it. These people are very like them—perhaps even the same. That's why I like it here."

He was touched.

"One day, Martina, I'll give a dinner-party for you at the Hôtel de Paris!"

She thought of a bad cheque, and shook her head.

"I shouldn't think we'd go back there for some time. But

the invitation counts, just the same. I shan't forget you asked me ! ”

“ Who looked after you, when you were a child ? ” he asked curiously.

The eagerness died out of her face, and she hesitated.

“ Different people. In different places. It all depended where we were. ”

“ And you still insist on considering yourself older than myself ? ”

“ How old do you think I am ? ”

“ Oh . . . ” it had never occurred to him. “ Fifteen ? ” he hazarded.

“ I'm going to be seventeen next April. ”

“ And I've been treating you like a small child ! Almost asking if you'd washed your hands for lunch ! I even called you an impertinent brat ! ”

“ I expect you were right. ”

Forest, peering in from the beach, saw them laughing together, and went away. He whistled, as he went, and lit an expensive cigar.

“ Will you sit for me ? ” George asked.

She wanted to say :

“ I'd die for you. ”

Instead, she observed :

“ Are you honestly a serious painter ? ”

He was annoyed. He turned red.

“ Why not ? ” he inquired, with a return to his haughty manner.

She felt desolate.

“ Only because . . . because you seem to have everything. Somehow it wouldn't be fair, if you were a great painter as well. ”

“ Everything ? Do you mean money ? ” George demanded, with a fine disdain.

She signified that she did mean money.

“ That's funny ! ” he exclaimed.

“ Why ? ”

"Some people think money buys everything."

"It buys most things," Martina suggested with timidity.

"Upon my word, that's a charming theory, from a girl of sixteen!"

Suddenly she was in a rage with him, and quite forgot her awe. She flamed:

"You're so spoilt I could shake you! Of course you don't think money means anything, because you've had it all your life! You've had everything you wanted—always! You've never had to scrape and save! You've always been sheltered by your money that you despise so much! Well, just you try to do without it for a few days! You'd soon change your mind!"

George, as a child, had once been badly scratched by a Siamese kitten. Now, sitting opposite Martina Forest, he experienced the same feeling of astounded incredulity. He gaped at her.

"At least," he said, with an attempt at sarcasm, "no one could accuse you of not being frank . . . would you condescend to eat another ice?"

She shook her head.

Her rage was succeeded by a feeling of profound shame.

"Lord Barradale, I didn't mean to be rude. Especially after all this food! And you've been very kind to me about the swimming, as well as lunch. I'm extremely sorry."

"Don't call me Lord Barradale!" George almost shouted.

"But I don't know your other name."

"Good heavens, girl—can't you say George!"

Martina could have killed herself. She felt her eyes smart with tears. But she retorted, with spirit:

"If you shout at me like that, I shall get up and go."

He said suddenly:

"Do you know, I'm beginning to think you're good for me. . . . I believe I drew something out of the lucky-bag when I picked you up on the Piazza yesterday!"

"You mean when you deliberately threw your letter under our table!"

He grinned.

"I admit that's a more gentlemanly way of putting it. Come along! I'm going to paint you."

"No. I must wait for Father."

"We'll leave a message for him," George declared impatiently.

But this manœuvre proved unnecessary, for Captain Forest sauntered over to their table even while he was speaking.

"Have you had lunch?" George asked.

"I lunched in Venice. But how nice of you to look after Martina! I do hope she hasn't been a nuisance?"

"She's been putting me in my place," George said, not without amusement, "and now I want to paint her. Can I?"

Forest reflected.

"What are you doing to-day, Tina?"

"I've got an appointment about five."

"So you have—I'd forgotten. Can you let her off by five, Barradale?"

"Yes, if she comes along now. And shall we meet at Florian's about six?"

"I'm expecting you there for a drink."

George got up.

"Come on, Martina. You haven't got a Spanish shawl, have you?"

She shook her head.

"Then we must try to buy one. Forest, would you like to use my cabin this afternoon?"

"I'd love to, if I'm not tempted by the Casino."

On the boat George said:

"You haven't really got an appointment at five, have you?"

She looked surprised.

"Why do you think I haven't?"

"I wasn't born yesterday."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't make you people out. But there's something funny

about you both. And you most certainly haven't got an appointment!"

She said nothing.

She thought:

'Even if I never see him again I've lunched with him. I shall always remember to-day, no matter what happens to me. . . .'

"You look uncommonly happy," George told her.

"I am happy."

CHAPTER V

GEORGE WAS A much better painter than Martina had supposed. He took himself seriously—he had, on leaving Oxford, studied in Paris and at The Slade—and he had a fine sense of colour. He was harsh to his model, but at least, after the first two sittings, he allowed her to read while he painted her in his sitting-room at Danieli's.

But she did not like the portrait.

Her high cheek-bones, her wide mouth, seemed to her almost brutally exaggerated. The picture made her look as though she were hungry. She looked as though she were searching for something she had lost, and would never find.

She was no longer, after three sittings, so much in awe of her god, but she thought that every day she loved him more. He himself seemed to take pleasure in her company. They swam together, by his invitation, and they lunched together, either with Forest or alone. Yet, although he painted her as a woman, he continued to regard her as a child. She might, she reflected, have been a puppy with which it amused him to play. Sadly, she thought of her shabby wardrobe. Once she asked her father for a couple of new dresses.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but it's out of the question, at the moment. That damned old harridan gets meaner every day. If I could afford to, I'd walk out. And Barradale——"

She forced herself to ask a question which for some days had been troubling her.

"Have you got anything out of him yet?"

He shot her a sharp, mistrustful look.

"You mind your own business, my girl."

"Very well," Martina agreed, "but if ever I'm rich—and

Annie often says I may be—you'll never get a penny out of me. Not one penny! So don't say I didn't warn you in time."

He laughed. His temper was genial, these days.

"Planning to become Lady Barradale? I'm afraid it's a forlorn hope! Still, if you were five years older, and had some pretty frocks . . . well, it can't be helped, and there's nothing much to worry about—our young friend still seems charmed with the family."

Martina was so much annoyed with her father that she hurled an ash-tray at his head and went off to brood in the nearest church, where there was no one to disturb her.

It became increasingly difficult to prevent a meeting between Barradale and Mrs. Paradise, and Forest was determined this meeting should never occur. Martina, for her own part, thought that the fortune-teller might amuse her friend, who was becoming daily more aloof with his conventional acquaintances upon the Lido, but Forest opposed her almost with violence.

"Why does he bother with us?" she argued. "Because he thinks we're queer, that's why. We aren't like the other people he knows. Well, if we aren't, Annie certainly isn't. She's——"

"When I want your advice, I'll ask for it."

As a result of Forest's decision a fearful quarrel broke out between himself and the seer, during the course of which she packed her bags and departed from Venice, leaving her lover with the next month's rent unpaid.

"Good riddance of bad rubbish," Forest declared, as the door shut behind her.

Martina was not so sure.

She went to the window and watched the porter piling bags into a waiting gondola.

As though conscious of being watched Mrs. Paradise turned and shook the old-fashioned umbrella without which—she was apt to quote distinguished examples—she never travelled.

"As for you, Tina," she shouted, "at least don't you forget I've warned you!"

Martina leaned farther out of the window.

"Warned me? What do you mean? Warned me of what?"

"Oh, shut up!" Forest called irritably.

She took no notice.

"Warned me of what, Annie?"

But the fortune-teller was scrambling into her gondola, and there were too many children screaming in the street for Martina's voice to carry.

"Now the old cow's gone you'd better clean the place up and I'll ask Barradale in for a drink," said Forest behind her.

"I'll start now."

In Danieli's hotel George was reading a letter from Isabel.

"Surely it's unnecessary, darling, for you to linger on in Venice when you know your father's asked us both to Camelos for August. . . . I'm so longing to see you there, and you've had three weeks' sun . . . your new friends sound a charming pair of lotus-eaters, but if you persist in preferring their company to mine I shouldn't be at all surprised if I became jealous. . . ."

George read no further. He crumpled the letter angrily.

"Sun! Why the devil can't she get it into her head that I'm working? Why won't she take my work seriously? Lotus-eaters!"

He flung himself on his bed and lit a cigarette.

Since his association with Sholto Forest the thought of marriage filled him even more than before with suspicion. He saw it in turn as a feather-bed that stifled, and as a cell the window of which was forever barred. He had, it is true, few illusions about his new friend, whom he now knew to be a rascal and suspected of being a crook. But the charm was still there; Forest delighted him; he was free, he called no man master. George would have liked to roam in Italy, with Forest and Martina as his guests, for another month, or even two; his detestation of shackles increased daily. But, as always, his thoughts revolved in a vicious wheel; he could not have Isabel unless he married her, and he wanted her more than he had ever wanted anyone.

He groaned, and picking up the telephone, asked for Forest's flat.

Martina answered.

"Where's your father?"

"Out. I don't know where he went."

"What are you doing?"

"Darning stockings. I suppose one day I shall have to wear them again."

"Stop darning, and come and amuse me on the Piazza. It's high time for ices."

"Very well," she said, "I'll meet you there in half an hour."

"I couldn't possibly wait as long as that. Be a good girl and make it ten minutes!"

"I'll try to."

She was too young, and too much in love, to be subtle with him. In any case, he was late, and she arrived at Florian's seven minutes before he did. But she had brought a book, and she did not look up until his shadow fell across the page.

"So this is what your nose was buried in when I was trying to paint you! What are you reading?"

She put her hands over the book.

"I'd like you to guess, just to see how much you know."

"Maurice Dekbobra?" George suggested, mischievously, sitting at the table.

She was annoyed.

"No!"

"What, then?"

She showed him the book. She was reading *Vanity Fair*, for the fifth time, so she assured him.

"Really? I must read it again. I haven't, since I was studying in Paris."

Martina explained, after he had ordered ices:

"I like any book about that time. I like it much more than nowadays. I'd rather have lived then."

"There I agree with you."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, "I can't see *you* in those times! You're so much the present."

"That's where you're wrong," George protested. "I'd have been much happier in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. No air-raids, no machines, no hideous bungalows, no stink of petrol . . . have you ever read *Borrow*?"

She shook her head.

"England then," he said, "had beauty. And peace. It's difficult, nowadays, to find either."

"Not for you, surely?"

"You mean *Camelos*? I agree with you—that's part of the past. But as a responsibility, it could only belong to the present."

She asked:

"Does your father like it more than you do?"

"Of course he does. After all, he bought it! It's not an ancestral home, you know."

"Isn't it?" she asked, innocently.

George laughed.

"My father," he explained, "is a coal-magnate. He was rich when he wasn't much older than me, and he wasn't much older when he decided to become a bulwark of the Conservative Party. Since then, he's held office several times, always with success. You see, he's a shrewd business man. He's a prop of the House of Lords, he's bought two newspapers, in the last ten years, he's always backed the right horse, and he got his earldom two years ago after he'd built a hospital for indigent Conservatives . . ."

"So that's better than a Papal title?" Martina wanted to know.

Before he had time to reply, two people, a man and a woman, came up to speak to him and to ask for news of Isabel. They were young and smartly dressed. He answered them with polite distraction.

"I don't think," he said, vaguely, "you've met Miss Forest . . ."

But he was so obviously anxious to speed them on their way that, against their will, they were soon sped.

"Don't you like those people?" Martina inquired, after a cautious pause.

"They're all right."

"You didn't seem very glad to see them."

"Why should I be? I can talk to them whenever I like. Now I'm talking to you."

This reminder that she existed only as a brief episode did little to console Martina. She knew—she had known from the first—that these rose-scattered days could exist only until the ephemeral petals faded, and they would fade forever, with his departure. She wondered, then, what interest the future could ever hold for her. It was charming to think sentimentally, as she had done once or twice, that when they were finished she would one day, in her memory, thread these days like pearls upon some warm necklace of her memory, so that they could forever beat against her heart.

But when she was near him, when his vivid personality was close to hers, these day-dreams availed her nothing. She was so sure, then, that she could make him happy. She would never, she thought, no matter what her circumstances, have consented to marry him, for had she been born into his own world, she would still have been too young for his taste. But had her circumstances enabled her to be near to him, she would have been content. He was happy enough in her company, even if he regarded her as a child. She knew, instinctively, that he was at his ease with her, and already she wondered whether he was as much at his ease with Isabel. She did not believe it possible that he could be. She smiled at him, catching his curious gaze.

Had she been Isabel, that smile would have annoyed him as being possessive. In Martina, it was endearing.

"You funny little thing!" he exclaimed, "how am I ever going to get on without you?"

"You did all right before you knew me. And why do you say that? Are you going away so soon?"

"Not for a few days," George said firmly.

To do him justice, he continued to regard her as a child.

She was sixteen, and he forgot that her mother was a peasant from southern Italy. His sister, had he a sister, would have been living in the schoolroom, at her age. That her life with Forest had served to make her precocious did not occur to him.

He was obsessed by Isabel.

The fruit-like curve of Martina's cheek, the sea-green of her eyes, the scarlet of her mouth, meant little enough to him except when he was painting her. As a breaker of hearts he was not wicked so much as thoughtless. He had even reflected, once or twice, how pleasant it would have been to possess a little sister like his friend. Such a companionship would have delighted him.

"When you're in England," he said, after a pause, "you and your father must come to Camelos for a week-end. Would you like that?"

"Yes," she agreed politely.

To herself, she thought that she would rather die than see him married to Isabel.

"There's your father," announced George, in a pleased tone of voice.

She said nothing. She sat silent while the pigeons fluttered, their wings beating, above her head.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS LATER that night, in the Forests' flat.

Martina had been sent to bed, and Forest himself was saying persuasively :

"You see, Barradale, it's the opening of a lifetime. If I can't get in there, I see myself spending the winter here in Venice. And Venice, in winter, without a gondola . . . !" he shuddered, and resumed : "or even with one, for that matter. . . . It pours with rain and there's no heating in this miserable flat. But if I don't go to Brussels with this proposition, well——"

George interrupted him.

"My dear fellow, I'd help you with pleasure, but at the moment I've no more chance of putting my hands on two hundred pounds than you have."

Forest looked incredulous.

"I'm on an allowance," George explained coldly.

He had known for some time that what he thought of as a 'touch' was bound to occur before his departure, and now that it had come, in the form of a suggested opening for Forest in a friend's Belgian garage, he was even inclined to feel a sensation of relief.

"I thought that possible," his host nodded, without any apparent loss of genial imperturbability.

George asked a question that had for some days been perplexing him.

"Just how *do* you make a living, Forest ? "

The Captain rubbed his glossy, coal-black head. Then he grinned, with engaging frankness.

"How do you suppose ? On my wits."

"I guessed that. But exactly how?"

Forest reflected:

"I've tried a number of ways. Years ago, for instance, just after the War, I was a croupier. I've sold patent-medicines on English fair-grounds. Being a 'crocus,' that's called. I've been a bookie. I've done door-to-door canvassing, which is worse. I've managed theatrical tours. I've acted as guide, on French battle-fields. I've dabbled in various unprofitable businesses. Real-estate, in Capri, was one of them. I've run cabarets, and I flatter myself I play first-class poker. But I've always lived from hand to mouth. Martina, of course, has unconsciously helped to complicate matters, but she's a good girl, and a help, or will be."

He dismissed her, airily, sipping his whisky.

George, for the first time, peered uncomfortably into the dimness of Martina's future. He glanced about him, and was depressed by the vulgarity of the shoddy little flat. That fat, tawdry divan, with its piles of cheap, gaudy cushions. Shabby curtains, with no pelmets. A terrible Benares table. Two execrably painted nudes, straight from the pages of *La Vie Parisienne*. A bust of Julius Cæsar. Fringes of beaded curtains rattling in front of the doors. Outside, the ceaseless echo of what he thought of as slum-noises. It was not the Forests' own flat, he knew, but bad as it was in summer, he shuddered to contemplate the very thought of it in winter.

"Martina's mother," Forest observed, in his mellow voice, "was one of those youthful follies from which, fun though they may be at the time, one can never escape. I'd just arrived in Capri, as secretary to an American woman. This girl, Teresa, came from a farm in the village. She'd almost decided to become a postulant at the convent nearby. She was seventeen, and exquisite . . . well, I married her. Then Tina was born. Three years afterwards my wife died. It seems a hell of a long time ago."

He sighed.

"What are you going to do with Martina?" George demanded, rudely shattering this reverie.

"Sometimes it's difficult to know what to do," Forest admitted.

"But she ought to be at school!" George protested, and he added: "a convent might be a good thing. But she ought to be somewhere. Surely you see that?"

"If I'd been able to get into this Brussels concern, I'd have sent her to a finishing-school," Forest declared, with a faint sigh.

"I could let you have fifty pounds. Would that do?"

"For God's sake, let's forget it!" his host urged, as though shocked. He added, with a twinkle:

"I suppose you had a shrewd suspicion, from the first, that I was going to touch you?"

George, in spite of himself, smiled wryly.

"The thought occurred to me . . ."

"You're nobody's fool," the Captain volunteered.

But George was serious.

"Listen, Forest, it's all very well for you, knocking about the world on nothing—in fact I envy you. And it's all right for Martina, now. But when she grows up, what's going to happen to her? Or supposing you died—what then?"

"'What's written's written.' And be careful"—his voice was suddenly grim—"lest I make you her guardian! She might prove quite an embarrassment, mightn't she?"

George got up and helped himself to a glass of beer. Martina had left her book lying on the table. He picked it up idly—*The Memoirs of Harriette Wilson*.

"Look at this," he said, holding it up, "surely she oughtn't to be reading it? And what's more, if she was at school, she wouldn't be able to!"

If Forest saw anything humorous in the gay Lord Barradale thus appointing himself Martina's nursemaid, he was careful to conceal it.

"I can't see any harm in that," he replied, in a soothing tone of voice, "she's mad about memoirs, or whatever they are. Always has been, since she was a kid."

"Oh, well, it's no affair of mine," George grumbled,

sitting down again, and feeling somewhat ashamed of the protective instincts aroused in him by Martina. There was, incidentally, no necessity for shame; his emotions where she was concerned were probably the most unselfish ones he had experienced since childhood.


The next day he telegraphed his father with a sad tale of gambling debts; within twenty-four hours he received a hundred pounds, accompanied by a severe scolding and a peremptory command to return.

"Look here," he said to Forest, "this is the best I can do. All together it's a hundred and fifty. And don't forget, it's on condition that when you get to Brussels you send Martina somewhere where she'll be——" he was about to say 'safe,' but on second thoughts he changed it to "all right."

Forest thanked him with dignity.

He was never one of your snivelling rascals—his was always more the swaggering personality of a pirate. He begged, as the Spanish say, almost with a curse.

"Martina," he assured his benefactor, "shall go to a finishing-school, and learn to become a young lady. When you see her again, Barradale, you probably won't recognize her."



CHAPTER VII

GEORGE'S LAST DAY in Venice dawned brilliant and golden. The city basked, lizard-like, in a breathless heat, and in St. Mark's Square the pigeons murmured from unseen niches, too lazy, it seemed, even to fan the air with the coolness of their wings. From church doors flowed a cold and scented dusk that soon lost itself near the slimy green of winding canals where the water was too sluggish even to lap or suck against those steps from which, long ago, in Goldoni's day, masked shapes had whispered as they waited in the moonlight for their fairy barques.

On the Lido the sands shimmered in a haze, and the sea was a lagoon, crystal-clear.

George took a raft-boat, and made Martina climb in beside him.

For some time he rowed in silence.

In their bathing-suits, still wet, and glistening in the sun, they were more like young seals, or mer-people, than human beings. They were both burned to the darkness of amber, their hair was dripping seaweed, and their bodies glittered with salt that sparkled in the sunshine. It was the salt, above all, that gave to both the illusion of a sea-change.

"I hope you'll like Brussels," he said, at length.

"Brussels?" she had forgotten it, trailing her fingers in the water. Once remembering, she said:

"In a way, I wish you'd never given him the money. Not that it won't be much better, for me. But I wish you hadn't."

"Forget it," he advised.

She frowned, her dark brows meeting.

"I'm trying to. But——"

"Oh, Martina!" his voice was irritable, "we've had a good holiday, haven't we?"

"Good! Better than good, I'd have thought!"

"Well, then. I'm grateful enough, and I've done something to show my gratitude. Let's leave it at that."

"All right." She asked, dreamily, "are you going to that house with the queer name, when you get back to England?"

"Camelos? Yes. You can think of me, darling, when you're studying at your school—think of me playing tennis with the neighbours, eating gooseberries in the kitchen-garden, shooting rabbits before dinner. Oh, and playing piquet with my father after dinner. He always cheats."

The 'darling' was casual, but it made her heart turn over. Then she remembered that Isabel would be with him, at the house with the queer name, and she shuddered with the hatred she felt for Isabel.

"I suppose we'd better go back," he remarked.

"Go back?"

"It must be nearly two. Your father's waiting for lunch. And you're shivering."

"Very well."

She put her wet head on her arms. There was so much salt on her cheeks that she did not even know whether or not she was crying. But she knew that they were alone together for the last time. Nor could she believe that there was any place for her in his splendid future.

Later that afternoon they sat for the last time at Florian's, and Forest, of course, was with them. Martina grew increasingly silent.

"Finish your ice," commanded her father.

"I'm sorry—I don't think I can. It's so hot."

"Feeling sick?" George asked sympathetically. He looked very smart in his light grey travelling suit.

She nodded, and Forest noticed for the first time how white she was.

"You can't be sick here," he told her crossly, "you'd better go back to the flat for a bit."

"All right," she agreed, listlessly.

"Hurry up, and be sick," George advised her, "I've only got twenty minutes, and you might just as well come to the station."

This was so like him that she smiled.

"I'll try," she promised.

But she knew, as she went away from the crowded, sun-dappled square, that she would not go to the station. There are limits to human endurance.

She climbed up to her hot, mosquito-haunted little room and crawled on to the bed, with her face to the wall.

She thought that she might consider retiring into a convent. What else was there for her to do?

She was so sure that her life was ended.

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PART TWO • 1937

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN GEORGE HAD been married to Isabel for one year, he remembered their anniversary. He gave her a ruby-and-diamond clip, and they went together to the play. He forgot their second anniversary, but he remembered—by accident—their third, on which occasion he presented her with a gold vanity-box and sent her flowers because he could not take her out. He had tied himself, for some time, to a business dinner at his father's.

Marriage with Isabel, he found, was a series of impressions, some more vivid than others. He enjoyed his honeymoon immensely. He amused himself deep-sea fishing in Jamaica, tried to paint the jungles of Trinidad, photographed birds-of-paradise in Tobago, and at night made love to Isabel. This experience was more delightful even than he had imagined. In fact, he liked the West Indies so much that one night, eating excellent fried chicken at the Robinson Hotel, Tobago, he suggested to his bride :

"Let's stay on here."

"If you like, darling. We should miss Bermuda, but I don't really care. This is heaven."

"I don't mean just for a week," George explained, "I mean indefinitely. We might look for a villa. Let's stay for months—a year, even. What's there to get back for?"

"You're not very practical," she answered, laughing, "you seem to forget Cheyne Walk's waiting for us."

"Oh . . . Cheyne Walk! *This* is paradise, Isabel; this

is the land of plenty—look, if you're hungry, you have only to walk out and knock down a coco-nut, or pick a grape-fruit, or an orange, or pull a flying-fish out of the sea! The sun always shines, and the sea's always blue! If it was good enough for Robinson Crusoe surely it's good enough for us!"

She looked at the menu and discovered joyfully:

"George—rum ice-cream! That's exactly what I'd have chosen!" And, "darling, we can always come back. Don't look so gloomy!"

He glanced at her, and was silent.

Isabel was tall, and generously made. Her body was magnificent. Her features were clear-cut, her eyes dark grey and heavy lidded. Her colouring was brilliant. Her skin was vivid rose and white, flower-like in its texture, and if her lips were inclined to thinness, they were well-shaped. She wore her hair, which was a natural red-gold, sculptured closely to her head, so that her profile appeared purely Greek, and she wore her clothes with a careless smartness. Later, perhaps when she was forty, her fine body would thicken and become heavy, and then a blur of double chins might mar the chiselling of that classical profile, but only a malicious person, or one acquainted with her mother, could prophesy so cruelly. In the arrogance of her youth, she was superb, and her golden radiance, her particular air of shining, clean-washed vitality, gave her so much the look of a tall goddess that it was scarcely surprising George had for so long desired her.

"You see," Isabel told him, "people—intelligent people, of course, would always in the end grow tired of lotus-eating. You'd be one of the first, my darling—you've got too good a brain!"

He smiled, staring at her.

Then, in the village below, some negroes began to sing a calypso.

"I love that savage music," she said, as though to herself.

He leaned back in his chair, staring up into the sky, where the stars clustered like bunches of gold grapes. The air reverberated with the massed chirping of a thousand invisible

crickets. Suddenly, to his own surprise, he found himself thinking, for no apparent reason, of his disreputable friend, Captain Forest. How Forest, as a beach-comber, would have flourished on the coral strand of Tobago! Unconsciously, he laughed.

She put her hand on his.

"What's the joke?"

He hesitated.

"Those fellows, with their calypsos. I must get some of their records in Port of Spain."

Later, that night, he thought no more of Forest.

That was his honeymoon.

In London, he accepted with cheerfulness the house in Cheyne Walk. There was an almond tree blooming in the stone-paved garden, the house was exquisite, and it was only when Isabel suggested a room at the back of the house as his studio that the enchantment, for a moment, ceased to work.

"A studio? What do you mean? Glebe Place is only just round the corner."

"But I thought you wouldn't need that any more. You could let it, now."

He looked at her thoughtfully, his hands in his pockets.

"Then you thought wrong, my dear."

"All right, have it your own way."

"Surely you didn't imagine I could work here?"

"I hadn't thought much about it, George, darling. But I can't see why not."

"Well, I'm not giving up Glebe Place."

She said no more.

It was only later, when dining with his father, that he discovered the truth about their alliance.

Lord Herries was a beaky old gentleman who looked many centuries more aristocratic than he was. He was fond of boasting that, as a lad, he had worked in one of his own mines, but, looking at him, it was almost sacrilege to suppose that in this case he spoke the truth.

He smiled upon his only son.

"Well, George, I've got some excellent port for you. . . ."

Over the port, he became less affectionate.

"Now you're married," he said, lighting a Romeo and Juliet cigar, "I don't suppose you'll feel particularly inclined to carry on with your career as a painter. That's more a profession for bachelor days, don't you agree?"

"I can't say I do," said George, after a pause.

"Some brandy?"

"No, thank you."

Herries resumed his cigar.

"I was talking to the Chief Whip a few nights ago. I think we could find you a seat."

"My dear father, I'm concentrating on a one-man exhibition!"

Old Herries asked, looking seriously at his son through a cloud of turquoise smoke:

"Hasn't Isabel mentioned the possibility of a seat to you?"

"Certainly not! Why should she?"

"I think she agrees with me. It would make us both happy if you decided on politics as a career."

"Have you discussed my career with Isabel?"

"Yes," his father said casually, "we talked about it once before you were married. When you were in Venice."

"Politics isn't my line of country," George affirmed, not without resentment. "I thought you understood years ago that the only thing I care about is painting. I'm not likely, now, to change my mind."

"You'd be well advised to," old Herries suggested, "now that you've married a charming and ambitious woman. Don't forget," he added, "that you married by your own wish."

"All the same, I'm going on painting."

Herries brooded over his cigar.

When he had sipped his brandy, he said:

"I'll be frank with you. Last year, Augustus John told me you had talent. I was pleased to hear that, coming from John. But, my dear George, surely you'll agree with me a thousand

other young artists probably possess as much or more talent ? What hope have you of ever making a great name for yourself ? ”

“ More hope, I should think, than as a phoney, wet-nursed M.P. ! ”

Herries regarded him with perplexity. He had always spoilt this boy.

Yet he had little understanding of his son. He was proud of his good looks, his charm, his delightful manners, even of his cursed painting. But he could not understand him. He had spent so much money on making George a gentleman, and yet George seemed more determined on making himself what Herries thought of as a ‘ Bohemian. ’ Then he reflected he had characterized his son’s wife from the beginning as a hard bitch. Better leave it to her. He knew better than to tamper with George’s allowance. He was no fool, and he realized, from the inquiries he had made, that his son was capable of making a competent living as a painter. In any case he had a little money of his mother’s. There would be trouble, soon, with Isabel. He did not like his daughter-in-law, but he had a respect for marriage, and, furthermore, he desired a grandson. It was better, therefore, not to make trouble.

He did not think of George’s mother, for he had long ago forgotten her. She was a pale ghost from the past.

So he said, with a geniality which deceived neither :

“ Well, nobody’s going to bully you, so we’ll change the subject. . . . ”

Later that night George had his first quarrel with Isabel.

When he returned to Cheyne Walk she was writing letters in her own sitting-room. It was a warm May evening, and there was potpourri in the hall, at the foot of the lovely fan-shaped staircase. He had for a minute the odd feeling that he was a stranger, entering a strange house. For one swift, baffling moment he could not even recollect what sort of room lay behind the door he was about to open ; he turned nervously over his shoulder as though expecting angry servants to throw him out for trespass ; then, as quickly as it came, this bewildering sensation went, and once more he was master in his own

hall, but there was sweat on his forehead as he opened the door. He could not, he reflected, have been more sober.

Isabel wore a long white tea-gown trimmed with white fox. She looked up, smiling, as he came in.

"You're back early, darling."

For the first time since their marriage he experienced the old, familiar dread of being possessed. He belonged to her, now, and to this house. He had whistled away his own freedom on the day he made her his wife. He was back early, and therefore she was pleased to see him. But she would not have been so pleased had he sauntered in at four o'clock in the morning. To get her, he had surrendered his liberty.

"Isabel," he said, "I hear you discussed my future career with Father, once before we were married?"

CHAPTER IX

THERE WAS SO much anger in his voice that she looked at him in astonishment.

Until that moment she had been almost sure of him. She had known, before their marriage, that he was not easy. He was arrogant and aloof and dreamy. He was too much accustomed to his own way, and for that, not wishing to blame him, she blamed Herries. But she loved him not only for what he had, but for what he was. Sometimes she sensed in him something wild, which might rebel when least expected, but she always consoled herself by thinking that the hold she had over him would, in the end, conquer his waywardness. And he had been so much tamer, since their marriage; he had seemed, as his father agreed, to have settled down.

Now, as he repeated his question, she saw that his blue eyes were as cold as ice. Old Herries had obviously been tactless with him. But she was determined to be tactful. So she said:

"There's nothing to be so upset about! Of course I discussed you with your father—not once, but several times. Don't you think it would have been very odd if we hadn't talked about you?"

Her bland manner did little to appease him.

He came nearer, fidgeting with an ash-tray he had picked from a table near the sofa.

He said:

"I understand you put your heads together and decided I was to give up painting for politics?"

She was relieved to know what had so much enraged him.

"There's no need to look as though you'd like to murder me! Is the idea so horrible to you?"

"Yes," he said with violence.

"But, George——"

"Isabel, I won't have you interfering! That's all."

"Can't we discuss this without you talking like a rude schoolboy?"

He mixed himself a whisky and soda.

"I want you to understand," he said, speaking deliberately, and ignoring her last remark, "that I haven't the slightest intention, now or ever, of giving up my own profession. I'm going on painting. I hate and loathe politics, and I'm damned if I'll have anything to do with them—ever. I hope you've got that into your head, because, if you have, you can run round and tell my father so in the morning."

He sat down and looked at her out of the corner of his eye. It was not a pleasant look, and her own temper rose.

"Do as you please!" she retorted, "by all means make a mess of your life, if that's what you want!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Go on pottering about trying to paint, and see where that will get you! Miss opportunities other men of your age would give their eyes for! Be a waster all your life, if that's what you want. But don't expect any sympathy from me!"

"Oh, I see." He was white, now. "So to you I'm a waster. Is that it?"

"No, of course, I don't mean that, and I shouldn't have said it. But . . . I don't understand anything about painting, and . . ."

"Then you mustn't interfere," he said again, looking not at her but into the fire. His face was smooth and blank, as though he had withdrawn entirely into himself.

Then, because she loved him—far more than old Herries believed—she said, gently:

"We're making rather a fuss about nothing, aren't we, both of us? Of course, nobody's going to force you to do something you hate."

"No," he said to this, "they're not. Make no mistake!"

"But, George, I do wish, all the same, that you had more . . . more sense of responsibility. You can't live nowadays like a Regency buck. You can't——"

"Like a what?"

"Well, like someone from the past. You've got such grand ideas. And yet you will mix all that up with painting. The two don't go together."

"Listen," he said, getting up and poking the fire. "If you like, Isabel, I'll refuse to take an allowance from my father. I'll live—at Glebe Place—on my small income and on what I make out of painting. So will you, although I don't expect you'll enjoy yourself! However, if you're willing, I am."

"Oh, George, don't be so silly!"

"Yes," he agreed, "I thought you'd say that . . . all right, have it your own way. But don't interfere, any more! It's not worth it."

He still looked furious, and the knowledge that she had lost this preliminary battle did nothing to console her. She knew, then, that he was stronger than she had supposed. Stronger, and more ruthless. She had always thought of him as a charming boy. She had known him to be weak, but now it seemed that she had been mistaken. For to her he would be pitiless.

"Very well," she said, lighting a cigarette, "have it your own way—we'll go on as we are. But it isn't so much what we're arguing about as the way you argue. . . . You've been vilely rude, you know."

"Isabel," he asked, suddenly, "why did you say that just now?"

"Say what?"

"About people of the past? Living like them?"

"Oh, I don't know! You infuriated me—I lost my temper, I suppose."

"I think this house is haunted," he declared, flatly.

Now, she realized, he was in a 'mood.' She walked across to the table and poured herself a drink. He was looking, in a bewildered manner, at a vase of striped tulips near the fire-

place. His eyes were no longer sulky. He seemed as though he were trying to concentrate on something. She decided to exhibit benevolence.

"Darling," she said, humorously, "you aren't going to take it out on the house, are you?"

"No, of course not," he replied, as though surprised. He added: "It does rather give one the creeps, though."

She realized, not without resentment, that he was unlikely, that night, to respond to benevolence.

"Oh, stop acting!" she told him angrily.

He discovered something.

"It's impossible to talk to you," he said.

She was deeply hurt. No, he had never been like that in the old days. She remembered, with emotion, their first meeting. They had lunched with a mutual friend, and when she left, to return to her film-studios, he had insisted upon driving her down in his Bentley.

"People who look like you," he had said, "must never be allowed to wander about alone in tubes. . . ."

That night, she remembered, they had dined together. She had fallen in love with him then, but she had kept her head. She was determined to marry him. Angry tears stung her eyes. What was wrong about that? She was in love with him; she was determined to make him a good wife. Why shouldn't she marry him? So far as she knew, he was still passionately in love with her, but he was no longer the same. He was elusive, except when he was making love to her, and occasionally, lately, even then. He seemed nervous, and this evening he had proved himself ill-tempered and discourteous. Suddenly, searching in her mind, she discovered something which even the memory of their West Indian honeymoon could not entirely blur.

He had been evasive, she realized uncomfortably, before they married; why, when he had returned from that Venetian holiday to take her down to Camelos!

At this recollection she turned to him and cried:

"I know when all this started! Don't think I don't know!"

"What are you talking about?" His voice sounded tired.

"It started in Venice! When you were involved with those crooks!"

"Oh, don't be a fool! I'm going to bed."

"George! Who *were* those people you picked up with in Venice?"

He looked tired. There was no colour in his face, and his cheek-bones were unusually prominent. There were deep shadows beneath his eyes. He felt as though he were in prison. He was frightened.

"How should I remember?"

"You kept on writing to me about these crooks. And you got in some gambling-mess——"

"Oh, shut up!"

He walked out of the room.

Later that night there was a reconciliation which Isabel would have enjoyed more had she not suspected that he had come to her less from a sense of repentance than because he did not want to sleep alone. Nor did matters improve.

She was forced to conclude that his father had upset him far more than she had at first supposed. But he was not rude again—she almost wished he would be. His politeness at times became disconcerting.

●

CHAPTER X

GEORGE'S ONE-MAN EXHIBITION coincided with Isabel's disappointment over a child and his own knowledge that the physical passion she had awoken in him was dead.

That, he supposed, was the tragedy of marriage.

But he thought of himself as the lowest of cads, and he could scarcely take any pleasure in his own success. It seemed to him monstrous that he did not share her unhappiness over her miscarriage, but there was no point in deceiving himself. He did not share it, although he pretended that he did; he had never very much wanted a baby. His father, however, who was as grieved as she was, assumed that he did, and between the two of them, he felt himself a callous hypocrite. When Isabel was better they went to the South of France for a short holiday; it had to be short because he had two important commissions to fulfil; *décor* for a new play, and, more important, a new ballet. His work was beginning to be discussed.

Later, when she had recovered, he realized, not without a shock, that he no longer wanted to make love to her. This situation appalled him, but he supposed that he might really have foreseen it. He had experienced it often enough before with other women. The trouble in this case was that no graceful withdrawal was possible; she was his wife. The sense of imprisonment returned, combined with the sick dismay of claustrophobia; for he was sure that he would have to live all his life with Isabel in Cheyne Walk.

What made it worse was the fact that he was fond of her. He would have liked her as a friend, and, of course, as his friend she would not have been content. He could not be so cruel as to tell her that he no longer loved her. Of what use would

it have been for him to enumerate her good qualities—her common sense, her courage, her pleasant temper, her thoughtfulness where he was concerned—when she wanted his love? He knew, then, that the premonitions he had endured in Venice were all too accurate; he should have waited, to marry. He was irresponsible—worse—he was undomesticated!

But he was determined not to expose his own weakness. He had married impetuously, simply because he wanted to possess a woman who had refused to become his mistress. No one had coerced him to marry her—in fact, his father had opposed the plan. But now that he was married, and had fallen out of love with her, he was none the less determined to make her happy. He would pretend, go on pretending, so that she would not know the desolation into which she had fallen. That, he thought, was the least he could do. But he continued to regard himself as the ace of cads.

Isabel experienced an increasing sense of perplexity.

He was so polite that she could no longer draw near him. Outwardly he was the George she had always known; tall, bright-haired, and charming because of that easy, graceful manner which had always made her suspect he had been born a hundred years too late. But his eyes, now, that had always attracted her by their vivid blue, seemed more often to look into some space uncomprehended by her; they were crystal-clear, but empty of the expression she had loved so much to see. She was not imaginative, but sometimes it seemed to her that George's eyes were blank like those of someone whose thoughts are many miles away.

They had a circle of friends, recently married, like themselves, with whom they would dine, and dance, and then sometimes he would drink too much port, and seem gay and careless once more, so that for a short time afterwards her mind would be at rest.

George invariably thought, when they returned home:

'If only I lived at the studio, and she lived here, how much happier we'd both be!'

The sense of imprisonment invariably returned to him

whenever he shut the front-door behind them, and he hated it.

"You haven't 'taken' against this house, have you?" she asked him once.

"Of course I haven't," he answered, laughing, "what makes you think I'm such a half-wit? On the contrary, it's one of the most attractive houses in London."

"Oh. . . ." She was relieved. She said: "You know, darling, we needn't dine with the Mortons and go to that dance next week, if you don't want to? I only accepted because I couldn't think of an excuse."

"Why shouldn't we go?"

"It might bore you."

"I'm not a hermit, you know. I'd like to go very much indeed."

His voice was that of a polite child accepting a party invitation.

She said, trying to smile:

"You're almost too perfect, as a husband! You know, we needn't go out, ever, unless we both want to!"

We! He hated that word!

But he smiled, lighting a cigarette; he lay sprawled on the sheepskin rug before the fire, oblivious to the white hairs sticking to his trousers.

"Well," she said, "it's nearly one. I think I'll go to bed. . . ."

"All right."

"You'll come and say good night?"

"Of course!"

He was left alone, then, with much that he dreaded. Possibly it was a pity, for both, that he could not have been even more ruthless. But he brought the smell of whisky to her bed.

Just about this time Lord Herries began once more to hint as to a political career. He came to Isabel, who felt that he could scarcely have chosen a worse moment.

"So we're no longer allies?" the old man grunted, after he

had grasped the situation, which took him a remarkably short time.

"No," she said firmly, "not about that. Not at the moment."

"I see," he nodded; "well, you're not lacking in guts—I'll say that for you. But why this change of face? Has the boy turned off tiresome?"

"He couldn't be sweeter," Isabel declared, torn between her loyalty to George and her own perplexity where he was concerned; "it's not that at all."

"'Sweet'!" jeered old Herries, "that's a damned silly word, applied to a man! So he won't give up his painting; is that it?"

"I haven't asked him for months," Isabel admitted, "and I don't intend to."

"Then what's the matter?"

"There isn't anything the matter," she answered reluctantly, conscious of that piercing blue eye that reminded her, not a little, of her husband's; "it's just that George is more highly strung than I thought, and he likes his work more than I ever suspected. It's no use trying to coerce him, and he'll only blame me if you do. He'd think it was a plot between us."

"And you won't plot with me?"

"No," she said frankly, "not at the moment. I'm sorry, Lord Herries, but I won't. Perhaps in a year's time, I will. Come and ask me then."

"I see," he said. And after a pause: "Tell me, if he worries you. He always worried me—so did his mother. She was a dreamer, too. They're not my kind of people—I doubt if they're yours."

At this moment George came in, to annihilate them both with a look of fearful suspicion.

After his father had gone he inquired:

"Been discussing my future, Isabel?"

His tone was light, but she was not deceived.

She said indignantly:

"I swear I haven't! Your father came to talk about that,

and I told him it was no good ! I told him to leave you alone ! Ask him—if you don't believe me ! ”

“ I believe you,” he told her gently.

He put his arm round her shoulders and said :

“ Isabel, let's go to Spain.”

“ To Spain. In the middle of a war ? ”

“ No, not the middle of a war. The war's nearly over, now.”

“ All the same—but you must be mad ! I wouldn't think of going, or letting you go ! ”

“ I was joking.”

He turned away, whistling.

The next day he informed her that he had joined the Auxiliary Air Force.

“ That,” he said, grinning, “ should keep me out of mischief for some time.”

It did, and he loathed the training, but he never admitted as much to anyone.

“ It's all right,” he said when questioned.

That told her nothing. But then, more often than not he told her nothing.

She did not think that he was unfaithful, and she was right.

Women had attracted him all too much, at one time, but now he shut his eyes to their charms. He was bad enough, he thought, without that, and he was particularly contrite because the doctor had warned Isabel against starting another baby for a long time.

“ I can't understand it,” she declared, in distress, “ I've always been so strong ! ”

“ You mustn't worry.”

“ But I do ! And you—surely you——”

“ Yes, of course,” he agreed swiftly.

He seemed happier at Camelos than anywhere else.

Camelos, as a house, was golden-brown, its main part early eighteenth century, its two outer wings Victorian. It seemed gold because it was built of Hornton stone from near

Edgehill, a honey-coloured stone that gleamed as though gilded in the sunshine. The house flanked a terrace, and smoothly shaved lawns leading to a broad, rush-fringed lake upon which swans floated. Behind the house the grounds spread ; a rose-garden, a formal Italian garden with fountains, and a small park where deer grazed. On the other side of the lake was a thick wood of fir trees, sloping uphill, and in the middle of the wood was a white-pillared Folly, or Belvedere, reputed to be very ancient.

Isabel, from the first, had been attracted by Camelos, perhaps because she had been happy there, and now, seeing George carefree, she felt she liked it twenty times more. It was virtually their country home, for Herries came there less and less. In the summer he loved his yacht, and a man's party ; in the winter he found Camelos melancholy. But he liked the young Barradales to entertain there, and he did not stint them.

Once, before her marriage, Isabel asked George :

"What's the history of Camelos ?"

"My father bought it from old Montford. They had it for years, and one of the Montfords built the Victorian wings. But, of course, it only had two bathrooms when we first got it."

"But before the Montfords ?"

"It belonged to some people called Clifton. And, before them, to some old, extinct family. But it must have been entirely different then. You see, there was much more of the old part. That was destroyed by fire when the Cliftons owned it, in the 'fifties, I believe."

Camelos, inside, was perfect. Old Herries had wisely entrusted its entire fortunes to the taste of a brilliant woman decorator.

Isabel was delighted to notice how beautifully George fitted into this place, almost, she thought, as though his own ancestors had lived there for many peaceful, spacious centuries. Then, when he rode out in the mornings across the park, or talked to the keeper, at dusk, by the bridge-gate near the paddock, he was as she had first known him, interested, charm-

ing, and charmed. How handsome he looked, in his riding-clothes, with his long polished boots, and his tweed jacket, with the wind ruffling his bright hair !

Yet, even at Camelos, he escaped.

He went out after dinner, down to the woods, he said, or by the lake, and sometimes, from the windows, she could see his cigar glowing down by the water. It always seemed strange to her that he should so much love being by himself. But there it was ; he did not interfere with her, and she had no right to interfere with him.

Sometimes, when her women friends complained of their husbands' interference over such matters as pomegranate nails, eccentric hats, or too many new frocks, she wished with all her heart that George would show as much humanity where she was concerned. But he never did.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN THEY HAD been married for three years old Herries renewed his attack upon his son, and this time he was less tolerant, more hectoring, and far less agreeable. George began to detest the very name of the Chief Whip, whom, in evil dreams, he visualized as some hideous bogey only waiting to scoop up the Herries fortune. At length old Herries refused any longer to meet George's evasions with good humour, and a flaming quarrel broke out between them.

George said :

"You can tell me to go to hell if you like and as much as you like. But I'm going on painting, all the same."

"Damned effeminate profession!" old Herries snapped.

George burst out laughing.

"I'll prove I'm no pansy, anyhow. I can make my own living, painting. I know you don't believe me, but I'll show you."

The old man grinned.

"Try asking a sophisticated girl like Isabel to camp with you in a studio!"

"Isabel's on my side, over this."

To the annoyance of Herries, she was.

She said :

"It's no good—you might just as well leave him alone. I'm sorry, but I know he'll never change. And it makes everything very unpleasant when there are these rows."

He ruminated.

"Where's that grandson?" he inquired abruptly.

"I only wish I could have a baby. So far, there's no sign of one. And I've been to four doctors."

He grunted, looking at her shrewdly. There seemed no apparent reason why she should not breed; she was long-limbed and deep-bosomed; she glowed with the superb golden health of a Nordic goddess. Hitler would have saluted her as an ideal woman, but old Herries, who knew more of women than did Hitler, had the sickening thought that she was, after that one miscarriage, barren. He had heard of similar cases. In any case, he had no thought of condemning her to live on George's earnings. He intimated as much.

"You *are* good," Isabel told him warmly.

"I've no intention of stopping the boy's allowance, if that's what you mean."

"If only . . . I hope he won't be rude to you again. He's so queer, sometimes, you know."

"Queer?" He raised a terrible eyebrow. "What do you mean, queer?"

She hesitated. He thought that for a moment her clear grey eyes looked haunted.

"It's nothing, really . . ." she explained, feeling herself a fool, "it's only . . . he seems to get further away all the time. I can't explain; it sounds so silly, and I suppose all marriages are like this after the first year or so. But I think he's far too fond of being by himself——"

She broke off; she could not continue. How could she ever explain to this tough old man that George seemed to her like someone who waited, patiently and apart, for something to happen from which she must be for ever barred? How could she conceivably tell Herries that she thought George slightly mad? She could not, and she said no more.

But her father-in-law continued to look at her thoughtfully. He said:

"I owe you an apology. Once I thought you'd only married the boy for his money."

Isabel answered frankly:

"I don't suppose I would have married George if he hadn't had a penny. But I love him."

"Then try to give him a son," said the old man. "He'll change his tune then."

She knew that he was wrong, but she said nothing. She was sure that she was the only person who could save their marriage. Old Herries, who thought himself so important, was no use at all, when it came to the point. And he nearly drove her mad, with his talk of babies. Nobody wanted a baby more than she did. But it was no good. No good at all. She knew that, too.

She thought of many things that she had never told him. Her childhood, in Sussex, with a bully of a mother and a father who was weak, vague, and charming. Then there was her own bid for freedom and her stage career, which had been an unsuccessful pilgrimage from one remote repertory theatre to another. Then a youthful, miserable love affair with a curly-headed actor she had never seen since, and an unsuccessful film test followed by a competent business job in the same studio. And then, like sun bursting radiantly out of the mist, her first meeting with George. He had seemed to her the Prince Charming of all the fairy tales, and Cinderella's marriage had been no more glamorous than hers.

And now, at the end of it, she was left with a man who was beautifully polite and courteous, but who might have been moonstruck, for all that marriage seemed to mean to him. Even when he shared her bed, he was a thousand miles away from her. He slept restlessly, and tossed in his sleep, as though his dreams tormented him; the moonlight streaming from the window drained his face of colour, and bleached his hair crystal. Sometimes, when his dreams troubled him so much that she became afraid, she would take him in her arms, and soothe him like a child, and then she loved him deeply, but he never remembered in the mornings. He was cool and charming, then, but he was a stranger.

He himself was only happy when he was working.

Sometimes he prided himself upon the cleverness with which he concealed from Isabel his hatred of marriage. He thought himself amazingly astute. But the desperate pretence

of a sexual passion he no longer felt was bad for his nerves, and, when he tried to forget these complications by working, he worked too hard.

The perpetual discussions with his father upset him more than he would admit, and now he never felt at home in Cheyne Walk. This house, to him, was sinister. He never believed, when he was alone there, that he really was alone; the whole place stirred with footsteps, whispers, rustling, fidgeting, and, worst of all, a definite, horrid feeling of grief he could neither explain nor ignore.

During this time he painted a friend of Isabel's, Lady Rosmaril, as a lovely, ghostly figure reclining upon a couch and tended by negro slaves. This portrait attracted considerable attention.

"Why," Isabel exclaimed, "the background you've given her—that's the temple at Camelos, isn't it?"

"The Folly? Yes. It fits in, doesn't it?"

"It's typical of the period."

"Isn't it?" he agreed, pleased.

"I think it's the best thing you've ever done. Much better even than that other portrait I liked so much, the one you hid away at the studio."

"What portrait?"

"A Spanish dancer."

"Oh, that? Did you like it, Isabel?"

"I thought it was excellent. Didn't I tell you so?"

"I don't remember. But the girl who sat for it wasn't a Spanish dancer, you know. She was a child I met in Venice."

"A child?"

"Yes. Why?"

"She didn't look like a child, so far as I can remember."

"So far as I can remember, she was half Italian. That might explain it."

She frowned, trying to recollect this particular model, with her dark brows, her slanting green eyes, and her smiling mouth. Of course—he had painted this girl in Venice, when he had been alone, and involved with those crooks—when he

had written her such strange letters ! She had never felt happy about that Venetian holiday ; in fact, it was from that time that she thought him changed. Not that she intended again to admit as much—she was not such a fool.

So she said, not too carelessly :

“ Who *was* the girl, George ? I don't think you ever told me ? ”

“ Didn't I ? ” His face was smooth. “ She was a child of about fifteen, so far as I remember. Her name was Forest.”

She was certain, too, that he spoke the truth. There was nothing there. She had misjudged him.

Sometimes in the summer, when George was at Camelos, he longed inexpressibly to get away by himself. He thought if only he could wander for six weeks in the Pyrenees, perhaps, or in Provence, he might return so refreshed in spirit as to continue, almost gladly, the pretence of being happy when he was only bored and restless. But Isabel's wisdom stopped short of permitting him so much liberty, and when he went to Switzerland, Cannes, or Paris, she was invariably at his side.

Then he felt like a dog on the end of an uncommonly short chain, and his manners became better than ever.

Other women continued to envy Isabel her husband. They said, with perfect truth, that he was handsome, rich, charming, and sweet-tempered. They asserted that their own husbands drank too much, gambled too high, were jealous, unfaithful, and always in debt. They thought and said that she was one of the lucky ones.

And she supposed that, despite his queer ways, they were right. Perhaps there were worse fates than that of living with a stranger all her days. But sometimes, when she looked back upon that first quarrel of theirs, that robust, hot-tempered, hammer-and-tongs quarrel, she sighed, for he was too remote, nowadays, to fight with her. She had never met anyone with such a gift for hiding himself away.

Nor was there any sign of a baby, and they had been married for nearly four years.

CHAPTER XII

ONE SUNNY AFTERNOON in April George was strolling along Piccadilly near the Green Park when he walked straight into Martina Forest.

Their surprise was mutual, their recognition instantaneous.

For George it was a revelation, for Martina was grown-up. She was not so thin as he remembered, and she looked taller, in a sophisticated jacket. She wore a tilted, fashionable hat with an impertinent feather, but there was no mistaking her pale green eyes and high cheek-bones.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, staring at her.

"I never thought you'd recognize me!"

Yes, she was grown up, and it took him a minute to realize this. A minute during which he continued to stare at her.

"Oh," he said, at length, "I would always know you—anywhere!"

"Well, that's a charming thing to say, and I appreciate it! I saw you from a hundred yards away, but I was quite sure you wouldn't remember me."

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Back to—well, I was going towards Half-Moon Street."

"Not at all. We're going to have tea at the Ritz."

She followed him obediently through the swing-doors into a magnificent lounge in which—of course—he seemed perfectly at home.

He ordered tea and lit a cigarette.

"Tell me everything," he said.

"Everything?"

"Yes. All your news."

She pulled off her hat. When he saw her dark, curling hair, mingled with bronze, he exclaimed :

"I thought you'd changed. Now I see you haven't. You're just the same !"

"The same ?"

"Yes. Only, you're better looking—of course."

"I thought," she said, "that you wanted to speak to me sensibly ?"

"Of course I do ! Have some buttered toast ? Where's your papa, Martina ?"

"In Half-Moon Street. We've got lodgings there."

"I see."

He drank his tea, and Isabel would scarcely have recognized him, so great was his excitement. He watched her over his cup, and wondered how he could ever have forgotten those vivid eyes, that red and mocking mouth.

She made a slight, restless movement.

"Why are you staring ?"

"For lots of reasons. Let's take the first. How are things with you, Martina ? Are you happy ?"

She was still dazed by their meeting. "Happy ?" she echoed in her warm, husky voice. "Oh, what a difficult question ! Sometimes I'm happy, sometimes I'm not ! That's like every-one, isn't it ?"

"How did you like your school in Brussels ?"

"Immensely—for the one term that I was there."

"One term ?"

She nodded.

"Look here, Martina, how old are you ?"

"I'm twenty this month."

"My God ! it's scarcely possible. Listen—hurry up with your tea, and we'll go round and call upon your father."

"No, not to-night."

"What do you mean—not to-night ?"

"He's drunk," she explained frankly, "and he'd never forgive me for taking you to see him. To-morrow, if you like."

He gave her a serious, scrutinizing look. Her hat, that now

balanced on her hand, was charming. But her coat was cheap, and so were her stockings, although she wore smart shoes.

She asked :

"Have you stopped staring at me?"

"I wasn't still staring, was I?"

"Yes. Hard!"

"What's your father doing in London?"

"Oh, business, I suppose."

"Crooked business?"

"You'd better ask him."

"I think you might have let me know you were here."

She shook her head vigorously, so that her dark locks flew out like wings.

"He wanted to," she explained, "but I wouldn't let him."

"I really think," George declared, "that you take a lot on yourself! Or else your father must have become a mere cipher, in your hands?"

She burst out laughing.

"He's a bigger devil than ever, if you can believe it! But he can't hold his drink the way he used to—that's his trouble."

"Rot!" George grumbled.

But the charm of these people—these crooks and vagabonds—was as potent, now, at the Ritz, as it ever was at Florian's, in the sunshine.

"Will you dine with me to-night, Martina?"

"No," she said, disappointment clearly written upon her face, "I can't to-night. I've got an engagement. But . . . will you ask me again?"

"I suppose," he suggested, "you've got a lover? Or perhaps more than one?"

She was silent for a moment.

She wondered then whether it would not have been better to have died than to have met this friend of hers again.

She said at length :

"No, I haven't got a lover. I never had one, yet. How curious you are! I can't say I think marriage has improved you. But then you always were spoilt!"

"And yet we've always understood one another. But, seriously, Martina, what have you been up to since last I saw you?"

"Oh," she said, lighting a cigarette, "a lot of things . . . you'd be surprised. . . . I taught English in that Belgian school. Only for two terms—it was awful. Then, in Paris, I got a job doing crowd-work in a French film. They wanted people who could speak English. But it only lasted two weeks. I was a mannequin, then. Then I went into a night club for a month."

"A night club?"

"Yes. An American place. They wanted a hostess. I got the job."

George knocked over a tea-cup without realizing he had done so.

"You—you—a dance hostess! And—may I ask—your father——?"

"He was busy," Martina laughed. "Well, that job came to an end; the place closed down. And then I joined my father here. I did a week's crowd-work. It was much easier—you see, I've got an English passport."

"What are you living on now?"

"Father, of course."

"I dare say. And what is Father living on?"

She hesitated.

"Aren't I an old family friend?" he urged.

"Oh, well . . . you know there are gambling parties, here in London?"

He nodded, intensely serious once more.

"Well," she continued, "Father's got a job as . . . well, he acts as host, if you understand? There are three of these parties a week, all in different places, of course, and he's what I told you—the host."

"I see. He would be," George commented, and then, struck by a sudden thought: "I hope you're not mixed up with these parties?"

"Oh, yes, I am," she told him. "I have to be there all the

time. I make conversation to people when they aren't playing, and offer them drinks. Oh, you can imagine what it's like! But I've got three new evening dresses, and that's made me feel it isn't so bad!"

"But, you silly little donkey, if they were raided, you'd be arrested too!"

"Yes. I know I would."

"I shall get you a respectable job to-morrow," he declared, grinding out his cigarette.

Martina laughed again.

"Doing what? Shorthand? Typing? I was never taught those things, you know. I can't do anything much."

"I shall call on your father to-morrow," he insisted, "and put the fear of God into him."

"He doesn't fear God or the devil," his daughter remarked, "but *I'm* afraid of these new friends he's made. They're jewel-thieves, and he seems very taken by them. Of course, if he started that sort of thing at his time of life, he'd be caught."

Her coolness infuriated George.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "you haven't got much idea of right or wrong, have you?"

She was really hurt. That he should so vastly misunderstand her seemed to her hard, and she said as much, warmly.

"If you think I like this sort of life, you're mistaken," she told him. "I'd give anything in the world to be born respectable! Anything! Unfortunately, it's too late to wish that."

"You'd better start working as my secretary," he decided.

"Yes, that's it—I need a secretary! We'll fix that up some-time to-morrow."

She knew, and her hurt pride made her furious, that this god was offering her employment out of charity.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I've no qualifications. I'd rather not be a secretary, thank you very much. I'd rather go on as I am, and take the risk. It would only mean a fine, anyway."

He laughed.

"I suppose you were born to be humoured?"

She said nothing.

An idea came to him.

"In Venice, once, I said that to you before, didn't I?"

She shook her head.

"Not to me," she answered decidedly, "I'd have remembered. You're mixing me up with someone else."

"Will you write your telephone number down in my book? Look—here's a pencil."

"Very well."

"Martina," he said, "I hate this house of mine, in Cheyne Walk. It's beautiful, but it depresses me. Can you understand that? I want you to see it. And I want you to see my studio. Oh! and, of course, you must meet Isabel. We'll fix that, too."

"Have you any children?" she asked, looking up from the note-book.

"No. None. Why are you scowling at me, Martina?"

"Because," she answered with dignity, "I'm not going to meet Lady Barradale. Have you got that into your head? You ought to be ashamed—to introduce somebody like me to somebody like her! You haven't got any sense—not any! Why should you even think of making your wife meet crooks?"

"Don't be a fool," George advised her; "you don't know what you're talking about. I can assure you Isabel would love to meet you."

"Oh, yes," Martina agreed derisively, "and I suppose she'd like to meet the Tattooed Lady, too? It's more or less the same thing, isn't it?"

"Oh, if you *must* have an inferiority complex!"

"Wouldn't you have one, if you were me?"

"No, I would not," George declared.

"Very well," Martina said, getting up, "have it your own way. But people like you—lords, I mean—oughtn't to know people like us. Any fool would realize that, I should think!

My father's new friends might be blackmailers for all I know. So don't say I didn't warn you."

"You've grown up very melodramatic," he mocked.

She looked at him in silence. How could she make this spoiled and beautiful being realize the surroundings in which she lived? Apparently she could not, for he said:

"I'll telephone your father to-morrow, and suggest myself for a drink. Will you be there, tragedy queen?"

She laughed.

"I'll be there."

"I intend to discuss your future seriously, you know."

"It's very nice of you. But I'm so afraid it may get you into trouble."

She slipped out of the Ritz into Piccadilly, and he lost her, while he was paying the bill.

CHAPTER XIII

HE LET HIMSELF into the hall of Cheyne Walk, where he found Isabel about to walk upstairs to her bath.

"Hullo," she said, "how was your game of squash?"

He stared.

He had had, until then, no intention of concealing Martina's reappearance. In fact, the thought of telling Isabel about Martina had amused him on his way home. Isabel, he felt, would be sorry for Martina. But when she so brusquely brought home to him the fact that he had entirely forgotten his Bath Club appointment to play squash with Dickie Firbank he no longer felt inclined to confide in her.

He said, with what lightness he could muster:

"I didn't play squash with Dickie. I forgot."

"But," Isabel observed, leaning over the banisters, "I don't see how you could. You left here saying you were going to meet him."

"I dare say, and it's very unfortunate. I walked through the Green Park, where I sat down and fell into a reverie."

He spoke jauntily, but he did not feel jaunty.

He thought: 'inquisitors like her deserve anything they get! Am I never to have an hour to myself, no matter what happens?'

Aloud, he said:

"Didn't Dickie telephone, when I didn't turn up?"

"I believe he did, once," Isabel answered. "I didn't speak to him. I sent a message to say you were on your way."

So she had known, all the time. She was trying to catch him out! And he had dallied with the idea of telling her about Martina!

"The Temples are dining," she reminded him. "I thought we might go to a film."

"Well, there's plenty of time, isn't there?"

She knew, watching him, that something had happened. He who had seemed dead for many months was now alive, vivid, almost radiant.

A cold finger seemed to touch her heart.

She was sure then that, for the first time since their marriage, he had met someone who attracted him. She was entirely guided by instinct, but this same instinct, where he was concerned, had never yet been wrong.

"Well," she said, "dinner's supposed to be at eight. So don't be too long changing."

"I'll hurry," he declared joyfully, bounding upstairs.

Watching him at dinner, she was even more certain that something had happened to shake him from his usual placidity. He talked eagerly, with a vivacity she had not seen in him for long; he never once appeared bored, yet she knew that Jean Temple bored him; his eyes were sparkling with excitement. She thought they looked as though someone had put a light behind them. His spirits were those of a schoolboy.

She no longer pretended, even to herself, that she believed his fantastic story of wandering about the Green Park in a trance. That is to say, he might well have wandered, he might well have been in a trance, but he had not wandered alone. Of that she was convinced.

When they returned home after the cinema, she could not resist saying:

"I hope you won't have any more of these mental lapses, George, darling. I shall get quite worried if you're going to roam about London suffering from aphasia!"

"So shall I," he answered, laughing. He added: "I must write a note to Firbank to-morrow. . . . I'm sleepy, Isabel. . . . I think I'll go to bed."

And so she was left, shut away with her own suspicions. She went to bed trying to convince herself of her own foolishness, and, somewhat to her astonishment, she slept remarkably well.

But the next morning her suspicions were once more aroused, for no sooner was she called than George came, fully dressed, into her bedroom. He looked pale, and his hair was untidy.

"Listen, Isabel, I shan't be at the studio this morning. I've got to see someone who's been taken suddenly ill."

"Isn't that rather mysterious?"

"It's no one you know. What do you mean—mysterious? You don't have to know everyone I know, do you?"

"But who——?"

He was already on the threshold.

"A man called Forest!"

He shut the door behind him, and she heard him running downstairs as though the devil were at his heels.

A man called Forest. . . . She remembered the letters George had written from Venice. Forest was the crook, the man who looked like Charles II, the man who had so much fascinated him that he had stayed on a whole week later than he had intended. And Forest had a daughter who posed for George—at that recollection all her early doubts returned to cloud her mind. She shut her eyes, trying to visualize that portrait of a Spanish dancer. George, she recollected, always talked of Forest's daughter as a child, but she knew, she had always known, that there was nothing childish in the face that looked out of that vivid portrait. She admitted to herself, as in imagination she gazed at Martina's picture, that in her most secret heart she had always been jealous of this unknown vagabond girl. At the time she had despised what she thought of her as her own lack of sense. But now she was certain that this girl attracted George. And, if the girl had really been a child in Venice, she was most certainly not a child now. She was four years older.

Isabel lay down in bed and shut her eyes.

She was conscious of an immense distaste for the situation in which she believed herself to be placed. If George really had started some kind of intrigue with the Forest girl she knew that her marriage, never easy, would now be menaced by

something she particularly detested for its banal vulgarity. A husband with a mistress tucked away in that species of flat described as a 'love-nest' ! George, of all people, to descend, fastidious as he was, to the illicit amours of any greasy, greedy little bookmaker ! No, try as she might, she could not visualize her husband sneaking out of his lovely tranquil house to sleep for a few hours with some wild girl of the streets. Nor could she imagine him returning to her with the squalid lies necessary to persons in such circumstances. He was not a liar, and he had never liked common women. Yet she knew, as surely as if she had seen them together, that the evening before he had been with Martina Forest. He had not only been with her, but he had returned looking as though he were enchanted, spell-bound.

Isabel rang for her bath.

It was no good lying in bed worrying herself sick. She would wait until he came home, and plan her campaign. Meanwhile, she must put him out of her mind. But this, as she discovered when she was dressing, was not easy. Whenever she reminded herself of his integrity, she found herself remembering that bewitched air with which he had walked into the house. Before they were married, she had seen that dazzled look in his eyes when he gazed at her ; she had not seen it for nearly four years.

It was perhaps unfortunate that old Herries should have chosen that morning to telephone to her with one last attempt to control George's future.

"It's about time," the old gentleman declared, "that the boy made up his mind one way or another."

"He has," Isabel almost shouted.

"Has what ? What do you say ?"

"He *has* made up his mind. It's no good speaking to him any more. He's going on painting !"

"Can't you handle him at all ?"

"No !"

"Do you realize the mess he's making of his life ?"

And old Herries, who unfortunately had fifteen minutes at

his disposal, delivered, there and then, a measured and dispassionate lecture upon George's lack of political ambition, during the course of which Isabel could scarcely refrain from screaming with nervousness.

"Yes," she said, mechanically, from time to time, "yes . . . I see . . . I understand . . . yes . . ."

"Don't keep on repeating yes!" her father-in-law bellowed.

"All right, then, no! What do you want me to say? I tell you I can't do anything!"

Old Herries rang off in a temper.

She finished dressing as quickly as she could.

"I don't think his lordship will be back for lunch," she told the cook, and, on a sudden impulse, "as a matter of fact, I'd forgotten—I shall be out, too."

Just as she was leaving the house old Herries rang up again to tell her he would not so much object to George's artistic career if the boy could be persuaded to become an architect instead of a painter.

Finally she escaped.

She had no plans, no engagements of any kind.

She went to her hairdresser's, and to a beauty-specialist. She then bought, aimlessly, three hats that she did not care for. Her lunch consisted of a sandwich at a snack-bar, and she spent the afternoon at a cinema.

When she returned at tea-time, George had not telephoned, and she had no idea where he was to be found.

She read the evening papers, and wondered if she was to be alone for dinner. She wrote several affectionate letters to persons she had not seen for a long time, and she succeeded in finishing half a cross-word puzzle. At half-past seven she heard George bang the front door.

He came swiftly into the room, and the enchanted look of which she was so fearful glittered all over his face.

"Isabel! Listen, there's a girl over at the studio, and I want to know if we can put her up to-night? I don't want her to sleep there alone, and I don't know what to do with her. Forest—her father's—dead!"

CHAPTER XIV

DESPITE HIS APPEARANCE George's day had not been one of rapture.

He drove immediately to Half-Moon Street, where the door of a dirty-looking house was opened, after some delay, by a frowsy servant with adenoids.

"Will you tell Miss Forest that Lord Barradale's here?"

"Miss Forest? You mean the gentleman who was took ill?"

"I mean his daughter. I want to see her immediately."

"Wot name was it?"

"Barradale."

Sniffing, she left him, to climb, very slowly, the dark and narrow staircase, whereupon she vanished, and there was silence.

He looked about him, hating all that he saw, which included grimy lincrusta, a brass pot containing palm branches, an aged stuffed pike in a glass case, and a thicket of evil-smelling mackintoshes hanging on pegs near the front door. Somewhere a clock ticked.

He waited for so long that he decided to ring the front-door bell again. Then, while he was on his way to do so, he heard a footfall upon the stairs, and saw Martina running down to meet him.

She looked pale, and her dark locks were untidy. She wore a flame-coloured jersey and a black skirt.

"Martina!"

"You are kind, to come here! I wouldn't have asked you to if it wasn't serious."

"Is he very bad?"

"Oh, yes, very. He had two heart attacks, last night. But it isn't that. His friends are here, and I don't like the doctor, or any of them."

She lowered her voice, and whispered :

"I hate them ! But I can't get rid of them. Listen, they were playing poker here last night. I believe he lost money—I told you he was drunk—and lately he's played even when he wasn't sober. He had the first heart attack when they were playing. Then they got him to bed, and then he had another—much worse. If he has another, he'll die."

"I'll get my own doctor round," George declared.

"He's asleep, now. But come up to the sitting-room."

He followed her up the winding staircase on to the top floor of the house. She opened a door and preceded him into a room clouded with a thick fog of smoke.

The room was small. It contained a table, two arm-chairs, and a sofa. The furniture was upholstered in plum-coloured plush. A gas-fire was burning. The table was laid with the remains of a cold meal. Two whisky bottles stood upon it, one empty, one half-full. Cigarette stubs were heaped offensively in half-a-dozen ashtrays. By the window was a card-table, and cards were scattered everywhere upon the floor. The card-table was piled with dirty glasses.

The walls were papered with dark red flock-paper, and upon them hung a few pale water-colours in heavy gilt frames. There were crochet antimacassars upon the arm-chairs and the sofa. The room smelt of whisky, cheap cigarettes, and stale food.

A more horrible room George had never in his life beheld.

Martina marched in, declaring :

"This is what I've had to put up with !"

From behind her shoulder, George beheld three men, half-veiled in clouds of smoke. They were sitting at the big table drinking whisky. One of them was short and pot-bellied, with ginger hair, and a jolly, crimson face. The second was tall, skinny, and sallow. He had not shaved, and his chinless face was already covered with a black fur. His shirt was dirty,

and he looked bilious. The third was a thin, pasty little fellow, with sharp features, foxy eyes, and a flash suit.

They glanced at Martina, but with indifference.

They did not attempt to move.

She said to them, furiously :

"Now will you get out of here, before I send for the police?"

George somewhat self-consciously advanced into the room behind her.

"Do you hear what I say?" Martina repeated. "Will you get out of here—all of you?"

"Shut up," advised the fat red-faced man.

"Don't you hear Miss Forest?" George demanded from the background, in what he hoped was a dominating voice.

The yellow individual looked up, gaping. A drop hung from his hooked nose. While George watched, fascinated, he wiped it away with his hand. The short, sharp little man rose to his feet so quickly that all the glasses rattled.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, "I happen to be Captain Forest's doctor!"

"Yes," Martina declared, addressing George, "and a fine doctor he is—you can see for yourself! He's been drunk ever since my father was ill. He's only sober now because he went off early to have a Turkish bath! He's no good! I want him to go."

"Look here, Tina," the foxy little man snarled, "you shut your mouth and trot away. I'm looking after this case——"

George approached the table.

"What's your name, doctor?"

"My name's Paulton, although I'm bound to say I don't know what it's got to do with you."

"Well, Dr. Paulton, I'll explain—Miss Forest isn't entirely satisfied with the case, and she has asked me to call in another opinion."

The sallow man looked up from his glass.

"In my view," he observed, in a high, nasal voice, "unnecessary. My friend Paulton's okay, aren't you, Joe?" He added,

"I don't know your name, young fellow, but mine's Peacock, Major Peacock, at your service. And I may say——"

"I don't care what you may say. Where's the telephone, Martina?"

"There, behind the screen."

The fat man rose, spreading out his hands in a deprecating manner.

"My dear young friend, surely you must see——"

Martina flung open the door.

"Get out, Kim. And you, too, Major Peacock. The doctor can stay, but you must go—you two!"

They hesitated, and George said:

"Don't you understand plain English? You're not wanted, either of you!"

To his astonishment, they disappeared. But they did not go very far. He heard them muttering outside the door.

"Now, Dr. Paulton," he resumed, trying to speak briskly, "I suppose you've no objection to my calling in Dr. Meyer Dickson, of Harley Street?"

The foxy man lit a cigarette.

"I didn't catch your name?"

"The name's Barradale."

"Well, Mr. Barradale, in my view, it's sheer waste of time to call in any swanky doctor, from any swanky street. Forest's dying; he can't last long, and that's all there is to it."

"Why should we listen to you?" Martina demanded. "You know you haven't been allowed to practise for years!"

"You shut your mouth!" Paulton shouted, his face turning mottled.

George began dialling Dr. Dickson's number.

"I'm going to my patient!" Paulton declared, "and I'm damned if I'll have him disturbed!"

There was silence, after he had left the room, until George succeeded in talking to his own doctor. When he had finished, Martina dragged the window wide open.

"That's all right," George reassured her at length, "he'll

be here in half an hour. Now for God's sake tell me about those men ? ”

She said, without looking round :

“ They're swine, as you can see for yourself. Peacock's another professional gambler. His real name's Cohen. Kim Ricketts' a bookie. I believe Paulton was once a good doctor. But he was sent to prison—you can imagine why—and now he drinks like a fish. They were here last night, when my father was first taken ill. They were with some other people, playing poker. They wouldn't leave. I'm going to clean up the room before your doctor comes here.”

He was silent, while she worked. It seemed to him monstrous that Forest should ever have exposed her to the company of these gross and vulgar men. It was horrible that her radiant youthfulness should even ephemerally be incarcerated in so foul a room. The adventurousness, the rollicking buccaneer gaiety, of Forest now seemed rather dim, to George.

“ I suppose he really is dying, Martina ? ”

“ I'm sure he is. Quite sure. I don't know how I know, but I do know.”

When George's doctor arrived, it was discovered that Paulton had fled. But the diagnosis was the same.

“ I don't think he'll last until to-night. But I'd like to get a nurse in right away.”

George tiptoed across the landing to peep at the patient. Forest, he thought, looked exactly like the death-mask of Charles II. The wax of his face was cast in noble lines.

He was unconscious.

George returned to Martina and suggested :

“ I'm going to take you out for some lunch. There's a restaurant near here.”

He had expected some hysterical refusal, but she agreed immediately.

When they were eating, George sympathized with her, and she felt herself an appalling humbug.

It was difficult to tell him how much she hated her father. Instead, she concentrated upon watching him. Her love for

him was something that she herself could not understand. It was as though she had known him intimately for more than a hundred years. Sometimes, when he was speaking, she could not believe that he was not, and never would be, her lover. For this reason she was incapable of expressing her gratitude for what he had done. It seemed quite natural that he should be with her, by her side, during this business of Forest's illness. It seemed incredible that they should not be together always. But never before had she known him so gentle and so considerate.

He insisted upon her drinking a glass of champagne.

"It used to be ice-cream, in the old days," he said, "but times are different, now, and you're a grown-up young lady!"

She said:

"I don't want those men to know who you are."

"We'll soon get rid of them," he promised.

"I'm not so sure. They say they're owed money. Well, I can deal with that, it's true—I know where my father's note-case is. But I don't want you to see them again."

"I can look after myself," he told her.

She smiled.

"I know. All the same, I'd rather they didn't see you."

They went back to Half-Moon Street. Forest died during the afternoon.

CHAPTER XV

FOREST HAD NOT been dead for more than half an hour before George made Martina pack a suit-case for the night. He then sent her off to his studio with instructions to wait for him. She was white and dazed, but she was not crying, and she made no protest.

He then found himself alone with the two doctors. His own man left quickly, and he was then confronted with Paulton, who drank quantities of whisky and proceeded to begin the story of his life.

"I don't want to hear about that," George interrupted, "I wish you to send for an undertaker—quickly."

While the undertaker was being summoned, Peacock and Ricketts returned, the worse for drink. They began, as Martina had prophesied, to claim that Forest owed them money. Peacock declared that he was owed forty pounds for the fatal game of poker; Ricketts insisted upon thirty pounds.

"You don't have to doubt us," he said, "we were pals of Forest's, just as you're pals with the girl. See?"

George gave them each ten pounds, and they departed, jubilant, if outwardly lachrymose.

Paulton's bill was settled after some argument, and he was followed by the undertaker and the landlady. George's identity was soon discovered, but by then he was indifferent. His surroundings seemed to him purely Hogarthian.

When he had paid the landlady and removed from the corpse's drawer a note-case containing twenty pounds, he took a taxi and went straight to Glebe Place. He did not think that he would ever forget the death of Captain Forest.

When he arrived at the studio he found Martina boiling a kettle. She asked him if he would like some tea.

"Yes," he said, abstractedly.

"Milk and sugar?"

"Yes."

He glanced at her.

She was pale, but perfectly composed.

He said:

"I fixed those crooks."

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Oh, don't cry!" he told her.

"I'm not crying. But I know those devils took you for a ride, and I can't bear you to meet people like that!"

This point of view surprised him. He tried to change the subject.

He said:

"This is an awful day for you. But . . ."

She knew, then, that she could not deceive him. She could not endure his own unhappiness.

"There's something I must tell you," she said, "and it's very difficult."

"Then don't try!"

"But I *must*! I don't want you to think I'm miserable about my father, because I'm not. I've been most unhappy with him, really I have—when you knew me first, and before, and after. My life's been hell with him. He's bullied me all my life. He's beaten me, and knocked me about, and he's let me starve. Once he shut me up in a room at Marseilles for two days. I never even had any water. And . . . when he was drunk, sometimes . . . but it's no good talking about it. And you mustn't think I'm sorry he's dead—I'm not! I'd rather you knew—I hated him!"

He stood staring at her, his cup balanced in his hand.

"I'm sorry," she said again, "but I had to tell you. I wanted you to know I didn't mind."

"I hadn't any idea," George said, "in fact, I thought you were devoted to him."

She shook her head.

"Oh, no . . ."

"Let's sit down," he suggested, "and consider what you're going to do."

"I don't know," she produced, at length.

"Well," he said, "you're coming back to Cheyne Walk, to-night. I'm going to telephone Isabel."

Martina felt a queer repulsion quite unconnected with the idea of meeting Isabel. The very words 'Cheyne Walk' chilled her with a shiver of discomfort.

"Oh, no! I won't do that! Oh, no—that's a ridiculous idea!"

"But why?" he asked, sincerely puzzled.

"Oh, no!" she said again.

"You're certainly not sleeping here alone," he objected, firmly.

"But why not? Why on earth not?"

"I don't wish you to," George informed her, god-like.

She was silent. It was impossible to explain either her own instinct or why she did not want to meet his wife. She looked at him despairingly.

"Look," he said, "you haven't seen yourself, yet!"

He led her across the room to where her portrait hung, and they looked at it in silence. He held her hand, loosely, comfortably. What happened next was not his fault. He could not help it. He had waited so long.

"I love you," he told her, smiling.

As she made no reply, but looked at him in a dazed way, he continued:

"You know, don't you, that I love you? You knew yesterday, didn't you?"

She said nothing, but tried to free her hand.

"Don't!" he protested, "you mustn't. You can't! You're the only person I like to be with. If you'd been really unhappy about your father I wouldn't have told you, to-night. But you said you didn't care, and I *must* tell you! Even in Venice, when you were a child, I liked being with you more than with anyone else. But you were too young. Yes, that was it—you were too young!"

She pulled her hand away.

"You could have waited, couldn't you?"

"Waited?"

"Yes. If you felt like that you could have waited. But you wouldn't. You were so deceitful—you made yourself believe I was a child. You never bothered to ask *me*. You were mad about your wife! And now, now that you're married, you come to me and say, 'I love you!' What do you expect me to do—you must have known I liked you then! And a lot it meant to you!"

It was his turn to look amazed.

"I didn't know," he cried, at length, "I swear I didn't!"

"You might have waited a bit longer! But you were so madly in love—catch you waiting! You didn't care what happened—so long as you had Isabel!"

He paid no attention to this. He touched her cheek.

"Martina . . ."

He kissed her, almost shyly, and she was lost.

The world reeled. He was no longer her god, then. He was something sweeter and nearer.

"You see?" he cried, releasing her. He was laughing, and his eyes were tilted, like a faun's. Something—some memory—struggled dimly in her mind, and was lost, although it seemed to her that they had kissed before, but they never had, so she knew that she was wrong. Yet she could never, for very long, repulse him. She turned her face away and said nothing. But her heart beat fast, and so, no doubt, did his.

"You see?" he insisted, triumphant.

"I'm going away from here."

"Oh, no, you're not! You'll never get away again. I've missed you too much."

She said in a low voice:

"You've got Isabel."

"I happen to want you more. I've always wanted you more, only I was too much of a fool to know it. And my marriage hasn't been too successful."

"Maybe it hasn't. But I'm not going to your house."

He was coldly determined, then.

"Oh, yes, you are. You're staying the night, anyhow. You've got to! I must explain to-day to her, you see, and I must have you to prove my case . . . look, I'm going back now, and I'll send my car for you in half an hour. Your suit-case is ready, isn't it?"

She protested, and it was a cry of anguish:

"I don't want to go back to your house, George!"

"You must! In your heart of hearts you know it, don't you? To-morrow I'll take you to your father's funeral."

"Thank you very much!" she flamed at him, "I can take myself to my father's funeral without your help! If that's an excuse——"

"Martina, darling!"

To her fury, she burst into tears.

"I'm sorry! I forgot all you've done——"

He took immediate advantage of her weakness.

"Then you're sleeping at Cheyne Walk—it's settled!"

"I suppose so," she sighed.

Once again he took her in his arms. But this time she started away.

"What's that?" she asked suddenly.

"What?"

"That rattling noise?"

"Oh . . . some lorry."

"But it isn't. It's horses—don't you hear? Horses and wheels."

"Some van, then! What does it matter? Listen, I'm going back now. In half an hour I'll send the car."

"It sounds so near," she said, listening, "it might be coming here."

"Well! we're pretty near the King's Road, aren't we? Now I'm going. You'll be ready, won't you?"

What could she say, loving him so much?

She said yes.

CHAPTER XVI

ISABEL WAS DETERMINED to be clever.

Therefore, despite George's bewitched appearance, his extraordinary story, and the justification of her suspicions as to where he had spent the day, she warmly consented to receive Martina.

"Of course she must come here, poor child! Did you say you'd send the car for her?"

She rang the bell, and was soon giving quiet, competent directions as to the preparation of the spare room.

"What an angel you are!" George declared, "but she won't be any trouble to you. She'd better go straight to bed with a tisane."

"With a what?"

"It makes you sleep," he explained, impatiently.

"What an old-fashioned expression!"

"She's only got twenty pounds," he continued, fixing her with blue, candid eyes, "she'll have to find work of some sort!"

She asked, and nobody would have known that she was terrified:

"How do you know that's all she has?"

"I'm sure of it," and he shook his head despairingly. "I've got it here, in my pocket," he told her. "I took it out of Forest's room. I suppose I was lucky to find as much."

Her heart was thumping so hard that he must have heard it, had he not been so pre-occupied. He was worse than enchanted. She thought one would have had to invent another word to describe his agitation, his gleaming excitement, his fierce absorption in the fate of this girl. She stared. She might

really never have seen him before. He was more a stranger than ever. It was then she knew, finally, that she had lost him. She had never been a particularly sensitive woman. Nor was she remarkable for any spontaneous intelligence. She was completely motivated by her love, which, at this time, made her mind unusually clear.

She knew that George was in a wild mood. One tactless word from her, and he would be gone. She knew, too, although she had tried to shut her eyes to it, that he was no longer in love with her. Such love as he had felt seemed to have vanished long ago, with their honeymoon. His evasiveness where she was concerned, his formality, his elaborate courtesies, had only signified one emotion—that of his boredom. And she had no child with which to hold him. She possessed only a beauty of which he had long since tired. Custom, habit, with him, meant nothing. He had always been more irritated than attracted by the intimacies of married life. He had married her because she refused to be his mistress. He had married her simply to possess her, his head still stuffed with dreams of his Venetian holiday, and of this vagabond girl. This robber-girl!

Isabel was sure that the girl, unlike herself, had never for a moment refused to live with him. Her jealousy became a physical pain, then, and she fought desperately for self-control.

"Why are you staring?" he asked suddenly.

"Staring? Was I? I was only thinking what an awful day you've had."

He nodded.

"Yes," he agreed moodily, "it was an awful day, all right . . . you see, Isabel, much as I liked Forest, sorry though I am about his death, he . . . well . . . he was a devil, you know. A devil!"

"I thought you liked him so much," she remarked carefully.

"So I did! What's that got to do with it? Do you mean to say that you've never, in spite of yourself, been attracted by someone who—well—who's pure evil?"

"No!"

"He had such charm, you see," he explained, as though to himself. He sighed.

"Do you think, then, that charm excuses what you call evil?"

"Not necessarily. But surely you'll admit that a sense of humour's always disarming?"

She tried to sound dispassionate.

"Disarming, if you like. But that's a different thing. Personally, I could never be charmed by evil. I don't believe you could be, either, in spite of your talk. You liked this man, Forest, and he amused you, but he couldn't have been as bad as you make out. He must have had some good points. You could never be attracted only by vice."

"You don't understand," he told her, laughing, and shaking his head.

He had receded still farther; he was so far away now that she could not believe herself married to this man; she could not believe that he had lain so often beside her at night, that she was accustomed to hear his heart beat close to hers. He was laughing, but he did not look like himself; he looked mocking, and his eyes, she noticed, were not laughing, but quite serious. For a second some primitive sensation made her shiver, and she felt as she had felt long ago, when a foolish nursemaid told her that there was a demon shut up in the wardrobe, and she had believed the story, cowering sleepless in bed with the sheets pulled over her head. She glanced at him, praying that he was drunk, but she saw that he had never been more sober. Then she was convinced that the Forests were devils, who had, in Venice, cast some unholy spell upon her husband's soul.

He laughed again.

"You look as though you'd seen a ghost," he told her.

"I have. The ghost of the man I married!"

But he did not hear her, for, as she spoke, the front door banged.

"There she is!" he said, and vanished out into the hall.

Isabel waited in the sitting room. She was not surprised to discover that her hands were still trembling.

She heard voices in the hall, and then George flung open the door.

"Here's Martina."

She prepared to greet her enemy.

She saw a slight, girlish figure with dark hair hanging loose upon its neck, and was at a loss to recognize the Spanish dancer of George's picture. Then she met the gaze of green eyes, and looking at the high cheek-bones, the tapering, clean-cut jaw, she knew that she was at last confronting the robber-girl of her sick fancies.

"I'm so glad you've come to us to-night," she said, and took both Martina's hands.

Martina looked grave and subdued.

She was frightened, first of all, by a queer, inexplicable fear of this house, and then by Isabel's beauty. She had never imagined such golden, rose-and-ivory loveliness; if George was a god, here surely was his goddess; it was impossible that, once having found such a woman, he should ever tire of her. Looking at Isabel, the scene in the studio became temporarily unreal; it could never have happened—she had dreamed it. But she had never been accustomed to show her fears in public.

"You're very kind," she said in her warm, husky voice, "to let me come here."

"A cocktail, Martina," George suggested.

"Yes, thank you."

"Come and sit by the fire," Isabel insisted.

Martina obeyed, holding out her hands to the blaze.

She said:

"I always feel cold in England. I've never been here long enough to get used to it."

She was perfectly self-possessed, and her manners were charming. She had no vulgarity, none of the raffishness Isabel had expected, and the latter was, of course, greatly disappointed. It would, indeed, have been hard to know, at

first, which of the two was the more apprehensive. After ten minutes, however, Martina recovered her self-confidence.

She looked, beneath her lashes, at Isabel's clothes, and thought :

'If I could dress like that, I might keep him. But she never will. I don't suppose I will, either. But with her it's hopeless—no matter how beautiful she is. She hasn't got his kind of mind. He'd frighten her, if he ever told her what he really thought about anything.'

George sat between them and smoked, looking into the fire. He scarcely glanced at Martina, but if he had shouted aloud his feelings for her, they could not have been more obvious to his wife. Her final proof, had she needed one—was to see them together. Although they talked little to one another, and their eyes never met, they were like one person. Their very silence set them apart. The bond between them was all the stronger because they said nothing ; they gave the impression that words were not necessary, between them, and Isabel was then the intruder, at her own hearth.

She got up, at last.

"George says you'd rather have dinner in bed?"

"But we're only dining alone, if you don't want to," he put in quickly.

Martina did not even look at him.

"If you're alone," she said to Isabel, "I'd much rather dine with you, if you don't mind?"

"Then," Isabel agreed, smiling, "you must go to bed early mustn't you? You've got an awful day to-morrow."

"Yes," Martina nodded, "the funeral. . . . I know."

"And you'll have to get mourning, won't you?"

Martina detected a note of patronage, and shook her head.

"No, I shan't do that. My father didn't like black. He said it was pagan. I shan't wear mourning."

"I see," Isabel stated gravely, and without approval.

It was George who talked at dinner. The women said little.

After dinner Martina was dispatched to bed with a tablet of bromide, and the husband and wife were left alone.

He said :

"I'm sorry about Martina coming here to-night, but I felt you wouldn't mind?"

"Why should I mind? Really, George! Aren't your friends my friends, too?"

He smiled, as though well pleased.

"I hoped you'd say that. And she's charming, isn't she?"

"Most charming. What's going to happen to her?"

"Oh," he said, "that'll have to be decided to-morrow."

"Decided to-morrow? By who?"

"I believe," he said, "that she's got some perfectly respectable relations here in England."

She felt an obscure sensation of relief.

"Then they're coming to the funeral?"

"No," he said, "there won't be time."

"But why," Isabel wanted to know, "is this man being buried so soon?"

"It's much better to get these things over."

"But surely you might have waited to notify these relations? I can't understand——"

"Oh," he interrupted, "Martina wanted it to be to-morrow. These relations haven't seen Forest for years, anyhow. It's nothing to do with them."

"Well," Isabel said, "of course it's your own affair. . . ."

Her tone signified that the affair might have been better conducted.

"I've done everything," he declared.

"Will she be here to-morrow night?"

"No. She can go to the studio, until these relations communicate."

She bit her lips, trying to control her temper.

"Don't talk nonsense, George! What would people think? A young, attractive girl sleeping at the studio! Of course she can't go there!"

He seemed honestly surprised.

"What filthy minds people must have!"

"Your own father——" she began.

"Oh, him!"

He dismissed Herries with a shrug.

Isabel said, with resolution:

"She can stay here, until these relations appear. But she's most certainly not going to the studio!"

"I think that's charming of you," George told her with sincerity.

She ignored this remark.

"Have these people, these relatives, been communicated with?"

"Yes. She wrote to them to-night before she came here."

"Who are they?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I haven't the slightest idea. Look here—I'm tired, and there's this funeral to-morrow—I'm going to bed! Good night!"

"Good night, George."

She was left alone, and she had never been so much alone before.

CHAPTER XVII

MARTINA, IN BED the next morning, stretched herself like a sleepy cat.

Never before had she been so comfortable. Once in bed, her superstitious fears were soon forgotten. She lay on linen sheets as smooth as silk, and resting on a heap of soft pillows, she could just see, from her window, the grey, flowing line of the river rushing past outside.

She shut her eyes, curling herself beneath the pillows as though in a nest.

The horror of Forest's funeral lay before her. It was to take place, by her own wish, that afternoon. Although she had hated the man himself, she dreaded the thought of his funeral. It seemed fearful to her, in her new-found secret joy, that anyone should die who enjoyed life as much as her father had enjoyed it. She thought of him, reluctantly, for his image pressed itself unwillingly upon her brain, and although she frowned, her eyes still tight-shut, she could not disperse it. She saw him, clearly enough, as a great lusty man, brimming with vitality, loving the pleasant things of life, reckless, cynical, and gay, a swashbuckling figure from a romantic novel—had not his mind been from the first hideously warped. She tried, sincerely, to forget the many sordid things he had done—she tried to forget his cruelty to herself, his petty cheating of men who could not afford to be cheated, his deliberate encouragement of elderly, love-sick women, his ruthlessness to everyone but himself.

She tried, for one dispassionate moment, to visualize him as some great and swaggering figure. But this effort was impossible; for she saw him unflinchingly, as a cold-blooded crook.

Yet the terrifying mystery of death continued to torment her; it seemed incredible, horrifying, that so vital a personality had vanished as the flame of a candle is extinguished by a puff of wind.

That she was alone, and without resources, did not at all disturb her. She had never been accustomed to security. And, if she had slept in the gutter, instead of Cheyne Walk, she would not, after seeing George, have cared twopence. The miracle of what he had told her in the studio warmed her heart like some glowing fire that, having once been lit, might never again be extinguished.

Long ago, in Venice, she would have died for him, and he had treated her like a pet kitten. But now he loved her.

She lay in bed, one arm before her eyes, her lips still warm with sleep, and sighed at the ecstasy of this marvel. Nothing mattered, now that he loved her. She was not in the least humble, but where he was concerned she knew herself willing to swallow dust. She had been born, she was sure, to give him happiness. If she could achieve that, she would die content. For a moment, she thought of his wife with fury. That woman, with all her advantages, could give him nothing! She had been afraid, at first, of Isabel's beauty, but she was no longer afraid. He was bored. Isabel could never make him laugh.

It was only with her that he could be himself.

Martina had few illusions, where he was concerned. She knew that he was spoilt and arrogant. Sometimes he behaved as though he were crazy. She did not, for a moment, suppose that he would ever make her happy. But she knew that with her, particularly since her father's death, he would find happiness. She could give him peace, and therein would lie her own pleasure. She would be content, with that.

As she dreamed, coiled in her pillows, there came a knock at the door.

"Come in!"

She was young enough not to mind her unpowdered face. For she expected Barradale.

But it was Isabel who came into the room.

Martina sat up, primly, pulling the bedclothes about her chin.

She was unaware that her eyes glowed, and her cheeks flamed, she was too young to know that her happiness was printed, plain for Isabel to see, upon her vivid face.

She had almost forgotten Isabel, but her eyes were envious, when they looked at Isabel's clothes.

Isabel herself was determined to be pleasant.

She said :

" I don't suppose you slept very well ? "

" I slept all right—thank you."

The robber-girl, Isabel decided, looked more sinister by daylight. With her dark, Medusa locks tangled, and her fruit-like cheeks flushed with what—considering her circumstances—could only be an unsuitable sleep—she appeared altogether too alert, too impertinent, and too mischievous. She did not at all look like a bereaved daughter.

" I hate bothering you, to-day," Isabel exclaimed impetuously.

This was not true. She was enjoying herself for the first, and the last time, during this strange business.

" You're not bothering me," Martina declared.

No one, watching her, could have guessed that she was devouring every detail of Isabel's beautiful, plain-cut black dress, but she was, and her eyes narrowed.

Isabel sat, with a delightful gesture, as though asking for permission, upon the end of the bed.

" George is working this morning, you know, and so I thought I'd speak to you."

Martina said nothing.

" He's awfully worried about these relations of yours. They do know, don't they, about your father's death ? "

" Oh, yes. I wrote to them last night. They'll know by to-day, and that's soon enough. He would have hated them to be at the funeral."

" Who are they," Isabel wanted to know, " these relations ? "

'She's too inquisitive,' Martina thought, in a burst of anger. But she controlled herself, and answered:

"It's only one relation—my father's sister. She married a doctor who lived in Oxfordshire. Her name's Seton."

"Do you by any chance mean the Setons of Steeple Stratton?"

"Yes. That's the address."

Isabel could scarcely believe her ears. She immediately ceased to enjoy herself. For a moment she was sure that this was a dark and evil plot.

"But . . . Steeple Stratton's only half a mile away from Camelos! Are you sure . . .?"

A glint came into Martina's eyes.

"Camelos? Where you live?"

"Yes. And surely——"

Martina laughed.

"That's the funniest thing I ever heard! I scarcely know England, you see, and so I never thought my aunt could live near you! What's she like? My father always said she was a devil! But I'd never go by him. What's she like really?"

Isabel asked:

"Doesn't my husband know your aunt comes from Steeple Stratton?"

Martina shook her head.

"Oh, no! She might live in Yorkshire, for all he knows! But, Lady Barradale, what's she like?"

Isabel had scarcely slept. She felt tired, and desolate. This was the last blow. This Seton business and . . . the girl's vitality. That glowing, unquenchable vitality. Isabel had, then, a longing to throw up her hand. She would have liked to say:

"Somehow, by some sort of witchcraft, you've got George. You and your dead father! Well, then, take him and be damned! I can't fight against you—you're too strong for me, and always have been! Take him and have done! But . . . when you've ruined him, you might be kind enough to send me back the remains!"

"What's she like?" Martina asked again.

"Oh, Mrs. Seton . . ." she goaded her tired brain, "Dr Seton is supposed to be clever . . . he treats Lord Herries in the country. His wife—your aunt—well, I can't remember her very well, although they've been over to Camelos several times. She's neat-looking, you know, and . . . well, I should think she's most respectable, and very kind!"

Martina grinned.

"No wonder she hated my father!"

Isabel said sharply:

"That doesn't mean she's going to hate you!"

"Of course not," the girl agreed, suddenly indifferent.

She had forgotten her aunt. She was once more awestruck by the beauty of George's wife. Then, thinking of what he had said to her in the studio, she smiled. Her smile was radiant.

"I'd better get up," she said.

Isabel said:

"I'm lunching out. But George is taking you to the funeral. You'll have lunch together, here, he tells me."

Martina said:

"Then I must say good-bye. I shan't be here when you get back."

"Oh, yes," Isabel insisted, "we arranged that last night, after you'd gone to bed. You're staying here until your aunt sends for you."

"You're very kind. But I'm afraid that's not possible. I shall go to a hotel, to-night . . ."

Isabel laughed, benevolently.

"Martina, you're charming, but not very practical! Anyhow, I shall leave George to deal with you. I think you'll find he agrees with me."

She went towards the door, and turned, kissing her hand, lightly.

"Don't attempt to get up before lunch! And, if you want anything black, you've only got to ring and ask my maid."

Martina sat up in bed with an air of courtesy that could scarcely fail to annoy her hostess.

"I know," she said, "that you want to be kind, but I can't go on taking advantage of your kindness. You see, I shan't be here, this evening."

"Nonsense!" laughed Isabel, floating out of the room.

Martina, left alone, fell into a fit of childish passion.

Then the thought of the funeral frightened her once more, so that George found her very silent.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FUNERAL WAS over, and they sat together in the studio.

They sat far apart, on either end of a vast sofa, smoking gravely. The brief April sunshine was over and done with, and the night was bleak and cold.

"Show me that telegram again," he said.

"Here it is."

He read aloud :

'Most distressed deepest sympathy you will always have a home here when can you come please wire us Aunt Hester.'

"It's the only thing to do," he commented.

She said nothing.

"The luck," he exclaimed, "of it being so near Camelos !"

"Look, George," she interrupted, "I really don't want to go there !"

He forgot all about the funeral.

"You don't ? You're crazy ! Why on earth not ?"

"I just don't want to," she persisted.

He took her hand.

"Darling ! Don't spoil everything ! If you go to your aunt's, we can see each other every week-end ! It's the most marvellous stroke of luck that ever happened !"

"See each other how ?"

He laughed, kissing the palm of her hand.

"I've got a car, and a very secret summer-house, at Camelos ! You wait and see ! I promise you we'll be in heaven !"

She pushed him away.

"Oh, no! That's hateful!"

"What do you mean? What's hateful?"

"I'm not going to love you like that."

"Like what?"

"Being smuggled over to a summer-house! Oh, no—I won't do that! Not with you, I won't!"

He was silent. His displeasure was like ice.

"So be it," he said, "then when are we to meet, pray?"

She had thought him impetuous enough to run away with her, and only longed, woman-like, for him to propose such a flight. She would then have refused to run away with him, and would have accepted the summer-house with joy. But she longed for a proposal.

"Well?" he insisted, "what have you got to say? What do you suggest?"

She made a vague, despairing gesture.

"Oh . . . don't ask me . . . anything you like. . . ."

"Then come here, when I want you. . . ."

He was too sure of her.

She slid away from his embrace.

He seemed bored.

"Now, what's the matter?"

"You think you can buy everything, don't you?"

"Well," he told her, in a reasonable tone of voice, "I can buy most things, you know."

"Not me!" she flashed.

"Really, Martina! Buy you—don't be silly! Don't you know I love you?"

He laughed, staring at her. He locked his arms behind her head, drawing her slowly, smilingly, towards him. She could not resist him, and she gave him her mouth.

"You're so lovely . . ." he said, at length, still staring down at her.

She was sure that he would eventually seduce her, and she felt that it would be most disgraceful for him to seduce her on the day of her father's funeral. She made a sacrifice her father would scarcely have comprehended.

She got up and said :

" I want to go."

He said, still looking at her :

" It would be funny, if those tales of reincarnation were true."

" Why ? I don't know what you mean."

" Only," he said, " I bet we've been lovers before. What do you think ? "

" I think you're mad."

He shook his head.

" I'm not mad, but my wife would probably agree with you. I thought you had more sense ! "

She reflected for a moment, and said :

" Look, I don't want to go back to your house, to-night."

" Martina," he asked, " I want to know something so much. Have you really never had a lover ? "

" I told you. Never."

" I thought you were telling the truth. But I had to ask again."

" I've always told you the truth."

" It doesn't make any difference," he remarked, " but, all the same . . . oh, I can't talk about it here, but you've everything I most like ! And now we're going——"

" I'm not going back to Cheyne Walk, if that's what you mean ! "

" You most certainly are ! Don't be a fool ! "

And he burst out laughing.

" I'll bet you can't get on with Isabel ! And if you can't, it's certainly your fault and not hers. You're a silly little ass, aren't you ? "

She could have killed him.

" It isn't that ! It's nothing to do with that ! But I'm certain she's in love with you—did you know, or are you too much of a fool ? "

" There's no reason," he told her coldly, " for us to discuss my marriage. . . ."

She sprang up from the sofa.

"You're the biggest coward I ever knew!"

He caught her arm.

"You're such a child, Martina . . . you understand nothing . . . you're still a baby . . . last night, you were afraid because you thought you heard horses coming down the street."

"I heard a coach! And you were afraid, too! It was a ghost-coach, coming for us, and you thought so yourself!"

They glared at one another.

Anyone seeing them for the first time would have thought them bitter enemies.

"Cowardly custard!" he jeered, his hand on her arm.

"What do you mean—cowardly custard?"

He continued to mock her.

"Afraid of a horse-van! Afraid of spending the night at Cheyne Walk!"

"I'm not afraid of spending the night at Cheyne Walk! But I'm not so cruel as you are. She—Lady Barradale—has been very kind to me, you know. And she's in love with you."

"That's not your affair!"

"It *is* my affair—when you keep on making love to me! You're so lucky, to have her. Why can't you leave me alone?"

"You don't really want me to leave you alone, do you?"

She flew at him.

"Oh, don't be so conceited! I've never pretended I didn't like you! But you think you can get everything! Well, you can't! You kept me waiting too long, and you wouldn't wait a minute—yourself!"

He said, with the most delightful charm imaginable:

"Darling, you grew up so quickly! But not fast enough! If you'd only grown up in Venice! You see, you were always the right person for me—always!"

"Well," she told him, "it seems to me you learned that too late."

"The moment you've gone away," he said, suddenly, "I'm going to tell Isabel. I'm going to ask her for a divorce."

It should have given her pleasure, then, to know how completely she possessed him. But she felt no pleasure. Her

love for him, she thought, should have compensated for everything, but, watching him, she thought of Isabel, who was so beautiful. Martina loved him too much to be selfish, and she knew then that she could only be, in the eyes of the world, a shoddy exchange for the woman who appeared completely suited to him.

So she said, and was heroic only because she was not thinking about herself :

" I wouldn't marry you even if you were free. And I don't want to go on discussing it ! To-morrow I'll go to Oxfordshire. Won't you take me back now ? I'm very tired, you know ! "

" If you like. Come on—I've got the car. "

She followed him without another word.

In the car, he said :

" So this is good-bye ? "

She felt too tired to protest.

" I suppose so. "

" But why ? We love each other, don't we ? "

She said nothing.

" Don't we ? " he repeated, looking at her beneath his lashes.

" Yes ! But it's no good. "

" Tell me why ? "

" You've got so much—you've got a future ! If we were together we'd only be a couple of tramps. We'd drag each other down. You'd hate me, if we were together for very long. "

" That's nowadays ! " he exclaimed, angrily, stamping his foot upon the accelerator.

" Nowadays ? Well, why not ? We're living nowadays. It's the present that matters. "

" There I disagree. "

" Why ? "

" Because I can't see that the present matters at all. Listen—I love you ! Does our love have to belong to any particular period or moment of time ? Doesn't it occur to you that we might have loved one another in the past, or we might love each other in the future ? What do we know about time, anyway

—we look at clocks, and tell the hours ! Well, what does that mean—nothing ! ”

She looked at him, scared, for he was not talking sense.

“ You see,” he continued, “ you can’t even answer. But it’s true—love has nothing whatever to do with time ! ”

She said nothing. He spoke wildly, and with a desperation that should have been flattering, but was not. She longed to put her arms round him, comforting him, but he looked too scornful for any such protection, and would probably have repelled her.

He said, his foot still hovering near the accelerator :

“ I probably knew you before, in some other existence. I know you now, and I suppose I’ll know you again. That’s why we get on so well—you see, we’re accustomed to each other ! But nobody would ever believe that, would they ? ”

“ I don’t believe it.”

He stopped the car, with a jolt.

“ You must,” he said, “ you’ve got to ! ”

For the first time it occurred to her that he was going mad. She was really frightened, then.

“ Very well,” she agreed.

He laughed, and started the car.

“ I’m not a lunatic,” he said, “ you don’t have to humour me, you know ! ”

“ I’m not so sure.”

He thought for a moment, and then said :

“ If I could get free, you would marry me, wouldn’t you ? ”

It was not fair, to be tempted as he was tempted her.

She shook her head.

“ I’ll never marry you, no matter how free you get. I’ve just told you why not. But . . . it’s silly to pretend I don’t love you. I want to think about it—about us—when I’m in the country. Then, come and see me. I expect it’ll be all right. About us, I mean.”

“ I expect so too,” he said, drawing up in front of his house. They got out.

"You see," he told her, no longer wild, but sweetly reasonable, "it's bound to be all right, in the end. It stands to reason, after all. It isn't only that we're in love. It's that, and something else as well. We're friends. Friends and companions. That means a lot, but I've only just discovered it."

"I'm going to-morrow morning, you know. Give me a week, and then let's meet. It's no use speaking about it to-night. Too much has happened, the last two days. My brain won't work."

From a window Isabel watched them talking.

She could see their faces beneath the street lamp, for the brief April day was finished, and they had stayed longer at the studio than they knew. Dusk enfolded them, and a pearly mist, hanging over the river, came up to cloud their figures, but their faces were bright in the light. Bright and sad and stripped, for they did not know that they were watched. Behind the curtains she looked down on their love, that was without defence. She saw their sorrow, their happiness, and their perplexity, but she saw something else as well—something that glittered like the clash of unsheathed swords. A radiance she had never known, perhaps would never know. One glance exchanged between them that made her feel old and shrivelled and unwanted, and contemptible too, as though she had no right to watch from behind her own curtains. But she would never forget it, no matter how long she lived—she would never forget that look of shared, secret joy, that look of a communion so exquisite that for a moment they must have touched the stars, and so, while she gazed, they seemed to her unearthly.

She turned away from the window, and put a log upon the fire. She was shivering. She did not think that she would ever again feel warm.

And those two? They could never again feel cold, no matter how often they were chilled by bitter rain, or frozen with the icy drift of snowflakes. They carried in their hearts a fire that she could never hope to extinguish.

George, when he came in with Martina, was a ghost to her.

They were both ghosts, and, looking at them, she shivered once again, before her fire.

"Come and warm yourselves!" she called.

She knew how stupid that sounded. They had no need of any warmth from her.

But they smiled, drawing near the fire, and she was surrounded by her enemies.

PART THREE • 1937

CHAPTER XIX

THE ELMS, STEEPLE STRATTON, Oxfordshire, was a late Victorian house of red brick, standing well upon the main road. Therefore, although in the heart of the country, it was exceedingly noisy. Behind the house was a grass tennis-court, a herbaceous border, a rock-garden, and an orchard. The orchard overlooked some miles of meadow and pasture-land, behind which lay a cluster of dark trees. Although Martina did not know it, these were the trees of Camelos.

She was received by her Aunt Hester, a tall lady with a tremendous bust, black, sleek hair, and the glazed red cheeks of a Dutch doll. It seemed to her incredible that this woman should be her father's sister. She smiled, trying to conceal her dismay.

"Your uncle," Aunt Hester said, and she spoke loudly, as some people do when addressing those they think of as foreigners, "your uncle much regrets not being here to welcome you. He is out at a Case. However, here's Aunt Mabel—we've decided you'd better call her that, although, of course, she's no relation. But she's your uncle's sister."

Martina shook hands with Aunt Mabel, who was tall, emaciated, and indeterminate. Aunt Mabel had projecting teeth, and wore pince-nez. She also wore a high-boned collar of net. Martina had never seen anyone quite like her.

"And, of course," Aunt Hester proclaimed, "Reggie will be home to-morrow. He's up at Cambridge, you know."

"Reggie?"

"Your cousin."

Martina had never heard of Reggie, but she held her peace. She looked swiftly round the room. She had never seen so many knick-knacks in all her life. The room was so crowded that it appeared as though one deep breath would blow them all away. Photographs in silver frames, snuff-boxes, china animals, biscuit-boxes, and vases. There were faded chintzes, a smouldering fire, and a draught proceeding from the half-open window.

"Had you no time for mourning?" Aunt Hester asked briskly.

"Mourning?" Martina repeated stupidly, confirming Aunt Hester's suspicions as to her ignorance of her own language.

"Yes! Mourning—*deuil*—black clothes! Had you no time to get any?"

"My father didn't approve of mourning, or want me to wear any," Martina explained firmly. She noticed, then, that her aunt was dressed in a black skirt and grey woollen jumper.

"I see," Aunt Hester said, after a slight pause. "Well, I suppose we shall seem old-fashioned, to you, if I tell you it will be thought peculiar here, that you don't wear proper mourning." She turned for confirmation to her sister-in-law. "Won't it, Mabel?"

"*Most* peculiar," Aunt Mabel agreed, in a flute-like tremolo.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Hester," Martina said, "but you'll have to explain about it. I couldn't possibly go against my father's wishes."

"I'm afraid we're not very cosmopolitan, or go-ahead, in this part of the world," Aunt Hester declared, not without pride, "and what your uncle will say, I'm sure I don't know. Do you, Mabel?"

"I'm sure I don't," the echo twittered.

Martina was silent. She was wondering how this woman and her father could ever have been brother and sister. Once upon a time, she supposed, they must have played together as black-haired children in Cornwall; together they must have

enjoyed jokes, and games, and secrets, as children will. But it seemed incredible.

"Mabel," Aunt Hester said suddenly, "I wonder if you'd run up to Martina's room and see if her luggage is there? I want a private word with her."

Aunt Mabel trotted away obediently.

"Sit down, child," Aunt Hester commanded, "and tell me how it happened. . . ."

Martina explained, vaguely and haltingly. It was difficult not to talk entirely of George.

"Ah! the Barradales!" her aunt exclaimed, not without vivacity. "I understand they take an interest in you! They're very popular round here, and I only wish they'd come more often. A charming young couple!"

Martina said in a low voice, simply for the exquisite pleasure of saying George's name: "Lord Barradale was a friend of Father's. In Venice—three or four years ago."

"There I must say you surprise me," Mrs. Seton remarked, rather tartly, "for I believe in saying what I think, and it's better to tell you, here and now, that your father and I didn't see eye to eye." She dropped her voice and announced solemnly: "*He was not a straight man!*"

"No, I know he wasn't. How far is Camelos from here?"

A door banged.

"There's your uncle!" Aunt Hester informed her, gravely.

Gregory Seton was a big, rubicund man with a clipped moustache, small, deep-set hazel eyes, and a booming, hearty voice. He appeared younger than his wife, but was probably about the same age. His hands were thickly sprinkled with freckles. He looked as full of blood as his sister appeared anæmic.

"So this is Martina! I only wish we were welcoming you at a happier time. . . ."

"I was just telling Martina," Aunt Hester explained, not altogether truthfully, "that she must regard the Elms as her home. After all, there are many ways in which she can

make herself useful, aren't there, dear? I'm sure she can write letters for both of us, and arrange the flowers, and take Topsy for longer walks than Mabel cares to, and perhaps, later on—who knows—perhaps she might learn to help you in the dispensary?"

"Perhaps," the doctor agreed, nodding his head, thoughtfully; he lit his pipe, puffing away like a grampus.

Martina clenched her hands, trying not to scream; yesterday George had held her in his arms, and already an eternity divided her from yesterday. Nor would she see him, by her own decree, for a week. She shivered, partly from misery, partly from intense cold.

"Do you mind if I go upstairs and unpack?"

"I'll show you the way," Aunt Hester agreed, immediately.

Five minutes later she returned. Her husband, sucking at his pipe, was reading *The Times*.

"Gregory—I can't say I'm favourably impressed!"

"Eh?" he inquired, peering at her, turtle-wise, from behind the shelter of his paper.

"The girl! She's very foreign and fast-looking. Don't you agree?"

"Attractive," he grunted, "but green eyes are never trustworthy, they say."

"I only hope Reggie won't make a fool of himself!"

He grunted again, and buried himself beneath the paper.

"Well, if your brother Sholto——"

"Oh, Gregory, don't let's go on about it again! We couldn't leave her to starve, could we?"

"Well, I expect she'll learn to settle down and make herself useful."

"She doesn't *look* useful!" her aunt commented, darkly.

"We must find her a job, somewhere. . . ."

But he was not really interested. For a moment Martina's youthful face had appealed to something in him that was not selfish or self-indulgent, but only for a moment; he could have been a brilliant surgeon, had he been more industrious, but now he was reading the report of a golf match, and he

really did not want to be disturbed. So he slid farther behind his newspaper, exhaling clouds of smoke, and his wife recognized the signs of a Royal dismissal.

Upstairs, Martina viewed her bedroom sadly.

It was more comfortable than any she had ever occupied, with the exception of the room at Cheyne Walk, but its cold tidiness depressed her. There were huge pink roses sprinkled on the wall-paper, there was a brass bedstead, and on the walls hung several faded photographs of her Uncle Gregory posing in college football groups. Furthermore, the room seemed to her bitterly cold, and no fire was laid. The grate was filled with a heap of silver shavings.

She shuddered, and hastened to resume her unpacking.

After a short time, a light tap sounded on the door which opened to admit the vague, peering form of Aunt Mabel.

"Settling down nicely, dear?"

"Yes, thank you."

"I came to know whether I might help you? Two pairs of hands are better than one, I always say."

"Thank you, but please don't trouble. I can manage very well."

But Aunt Mabel seemed in no hurry to depart.

She said, settling herself deprecatingly in the one easy chair:

"All this sad time must have made you feel very lonely. Very lonely indeed. I wanted you to know, dear, that I sympathize with you. When I was your age, I used often to be lonely, too."

"Yes?"

"What a pretty colour that dress is! Isn't it what they call 'tango'? Well, I wanted to tell you, you couldn't have fallen into better hands, as the saying goes, than you have. Your Uncle Gregory—well, you can see for yourself what a splendid man he is. No trouble's too much for him, I always say. And your Aunt Hester—well, Martina, she's a really remarkable woman, and I only wish I had half her brain and common sense. Whenever I think of Aunt Hester, I think—

Brain. One word. Just like that. But, of course, she isn't as young as she was, and nor am I. That's why it's so nice to think of a young girl sharing our home. You see, there are so many ways in which you will be able to help Aunt Hester, aren't there? For instance——"

Martina, whose distracted thoughts had carried her far away, now looked up, kneeling on the floor, and asked from amid a mass of disordered garments :

"Do you know Lord Barradale, too?"

Her voice was soft, her manner disarming.

Aunt Mabel forgot her displeasure at the interruption and declared, clapping her hands girlishly :

"Indeed I do! Your Uncle Gregory attended Lord Herries for lumbago, you know, some years ago, and I believe Lord Herries swears by him! He seldom comes here now, I'm sorry to say. But last summer we went to the Camelos garden-party. All of us—Reggie, too! What a handsome couple they are, to be sure, the Barradales! I always say film-stars are nothing compared to them—nothing at all! I mean . . . even Robert Donat! And Lady Barradale's sweetly pretty, isn't she? So graceful, too! Oh, yes, they're a wonderful asset to the neighbourhood, and it always seems to me a pity they live so much in town, or Abroad. But I mustn't say so to you, must I? I keep forgetting you were brought up Abroad, and yet your accent is very little foreign!"

The light died out of Martina's face, and she began, carefully, to fold a dress.

"Another thing," Aunt Mabel whispered confidentially, "I'd always hoped, between ourselves, that your Uncle Gregory might be called over to Camelos to 'collect'—as he so nicely puts it—a wee baby for the Barradales! That would be so pleasant—a son and heir! So far, I must admit, my dream hasn't come true! But, of course, they're still young and bonny!"

"It's awfully cold, in here," Martina announced abruptly, and quite without the sympathetic interest expected by Aunt Mabel.

"Surely not cold? After all, dear, we're in the middle of April!"

"I've never been so cold in my life," Martina insisted.

"Well, there it is," Aunt Mabel exclaimed brightly, "we must make allowances for you—you're used to Abroad!" She added, after a moment:

"Your poor father met Lord Barradale, didn't he?"

"Yes. In Venice."

And the painful joy of mentioning his name, even to this old fool, returned to her, so that her cheeks flushed, and her eyes were bright again, and her face was brimful of vitality.

"Oh, yes," she continued, "he was very fond of my father. . . ."

Aunt Mabel's one unconfessed passion in life was for the wicked Captain Forest, Hester's unmentionable brother. She had never seen him, but all the same he had unconsciously played the role of her dream lover. At night, piecing together Hester's meagre information, she visualized him, dark, dashing, gallant, and . . . if he were a little unscrupulous regarding money matters . . . well, so were many other legendary heroes. Pirates, for instance. Or Robin Hood.

She sighed, sentimentally.

"I'm sure he was, dear . . . such a sad time for you . . . such a sad time. . . ."

But the girl did not *look* sad, she reflected; on the contrary, her face was brilliant.

A bell clanged throughout the house, and Aunt Mabel rose mechanically, like an obedient fire-horse.

"Supper, Martina. Aren't you hungry?"

CHAPTER XX

THE NEXT DAY Reggie arrived.

He was in his first year at Cambridge, where he was studying medicine.

Reggie Seton was a short, thick-set youth with a somewhat academic voice, and a face that would have been pleasant enough but for an outbreak of those unsightly spots common to one of his age.

Martina was out when he arrived. She was plodding down a muddy lane with Topsy, the fat spaniel, waddling behind her. The exercising of Topsy was, she learned, to be one of her daily tasks.

"How's the cousin?" Reggie soon inquired of his doting mother.

"She needs plenty of fresh air," Mrs. Seton returned briskly, "she's quite a nice little thing, but she's—well, she's peaky and—er—foreign looking. You haven't really told me what sort of term you've had?"

"Damn' boring," he replied, relapsing into the moody silence habitual to him during his vacations.

But when Martina returned from her walk his interest in life appeared to return rapidly, and Aunt Hester realized, not without foreboding, that it was impossible to dismiss this niece so airily as she had at first supposed.

Not, she reflected suspiciously, that the girl seemed to *encourage* him; she was quiet enough, certainly; too quiet, perhaps, and that, as everyone knew, meant one thing—slyness.

"Can you drive a car, Martina?" Reggie asked at supper.

The doctor was absent on some obstetrical jaunt or other, and Reggie sat at the head of the table.

She shook her head.

"No, I can't."

She was disappointed in her cousin, finding him both clumsy and unbeautiful, but at least he was young, and, for that reason, welcome. She had cried herself to sleep, the night before, and she had dreamed that she was shut up in a museum filled with mummies.

"Well, I'll teach you," Reggie volunteered. "I've got my bus here, you know, and it's something to do."

Aunt Hester pursed her lips, but before she could speak Aunt Mabel intervened in a burst of girlish impetuosity.

"Why, only think, Martina," she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "if you learn well enough, who knows, one day you may be able to drive Uncle Gregory on his rounds!"

Reggie scowled fearfully, and his mother frowned, but from an entirely different motive. Although Aunt Hester frowned, she said nothing, for the excellent reason that Aunt Mabel's interruption, ill-timed though it was, seemed to contain the germ of a sensible idea. The doctor much disliked driving himself. If only Reggie kept his head . . . and this girl of Sholto's must make herself useful.

"Thank you, Reggie," Martina said. "I'd like to try."

"Funny, you not being able to drive," Reggie observed, with unwonted vivacity; "most girls can, nowadays, can't they? I mean, what with A.R.P., and everything."

"You forget, dear," Aunt Mabel reminded him gently, "your cousin was brought up Abroad."

Later that evening, after Uncle Gregory's return, when Martina had been forced to admit, with a growing sense of humiliation, that she played neither golf nor tennis, she invented a headache, and went to bed. If she had stayed any longer in the drawing-room, she would have screamed aloud.

She said to Reggie, as he opened the door for her:

"I *can* swim!"

"Well," he said, "we'll have to wait for that until the Long Vac. But I'll give you your first driving lesson to-morrow! Good night!"

The drawing-room, after her departure, seemed to him increasingly gloomy. He wandered about, fidgeting, and at length announced that he was going down to the public-house for a game of darts. He banged the front door as he went.

"Damned bull in a china-shop," his father grunted, now completely enveloped in the *Banbury Guardian*.

Aunt Hester, darning socks, remarked without raising her head :

"I rather wish Martina's arrival hadn't clashed with the beginning of this vacation."

Aunt Mabel, crocheting, breathed :

"Oh, Hester, do you think . . . ?"

"No, I don't think ! Don't be a fool, Mabel !"

Aunt Mabel subsided, crushed.

Her sister-in-law, elated by this brief triumph, so far unbent as to continue :

"But the girl's taking, in a foreign way, and Reggie has few friends of his own age here. I don't want him to make a fool of himself, that's all."

"There are always the Carey girls," Aunt Mabel suggested, not without humility.

Aunt Hester snorted, as well she might, for the Carey 'girls' were three elderly young ladies with rabbity chins, slight moustaches, and a deep cult for the local Girl Guides.

As she went upstairs that night, Aunt Hester, a conventional woman, was struck by probably the first melodramatic idea she had ever entertained.

She thought :

"I'd rather see Reggie in his grave than entangled with any daughter of Sholto's !"

The next day Martina had her first driving lesson. It was not so much a lesson as an excursion. Reggie drove his Austin slowly about the neighbouring lanes, talking incessantly about himself, while his cousin pretended to listen. But she looked about her at what she thought of as George's countryside, and, because it was his, found it rare and lovely.

Pale April sunshine warmed the primroses clustering so

thickly in the hedgerows; a robin sang from the branches of a budding thorn-tree, and the beeches of a spinney nearby were touched with a promise of delicate green. The earth, that had known so much rain, smelled clean and fresh, and wet violets darkened the ditch-hollows with their sweetness. The sky, silvery blue, was dappled with scudding clouds. Martina, who knew little enough about her own country, was spell-bound. For a moment it was as though the Elms did not exist; she forgot Aunt Hester, Uncle Gregory, and the fluttering gentility of Aunt Mabel. She forgot, too, the young man beside her, who had not indeed existed for some minutes.

"How beautiful it is!" she sighed, and her voice was like golden honey.

"You're jolly pretty!" he cried, and tried, clumsily enough, to kiss her.

She pushed him away impatiently.

"Oh, don't be so silly!" she exclaimed, for he had broken a spell.

"Silly?"

There was so much outrage in his voice that she turned, unwillingly, tearing herself away from this beauty that she was discovering.

"Yes, silly!"

He repeated, with a sort of stubbornness: "You're jolly pretty. I'm more than half in love with you. Give me a kiss!"

She thought, then, of the last time she had driven in a car with a man. She had been with Barradale, who had talked as though he were demented. She remembered, with a feeling of mingled pleasure and pain, his stern, beautiful profile, his wild words, and his musical voice. Soon, in five days, now, she would hear from him. She could afford to be tolerant.

"I'm sorry, Reggie," she said, "but it's no good pretending we're in love, or want to kiss one another, is it?"

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly, starting the car.

There was a long pause.

She said, at length, forgetting their dispute:

"Can we go near Camelos, Reggie, or is it impossible?"

"We can go through the park, if you want."

He spoke exactly as though he had swallowed a plum, and was spitting out the stone. She knew that something must be wrong, and felt, vaguely, that the fault must be hers. But she was bored with him, and she could not conceal her boredom.

"You needn't be so sour," she said. "I never asked you to kiss me."

He laughed, bitterly, and changed the subject.

"I suppose," he said, "you're like your father."

She had no conception of the insult intended.

"I'm not a bit like him. Why?"

"They think at the house," he informed her, "that you were all over the place with him."

The colloquial English puzzled her.

"What place? What do you mean?"

"Oh, shut up! Here's Camelos park. You wanted to see it."

She was puzzled, for although accustomed to crooks, she had hitherto encountered few oafs. But she had little enough time to spare for him, for they were driving through the park of Camelos. She put her head out of the car, looking eagerly about her. She saw acres of billowing, emerald turf, studded with clumps of thorn and ash and oak, and, in the distance, the gleam of dark waters. There was something else, too, in the distance; the golden-brown pile of a distant house cradled amongst tall trees.

"George's home," she thought, forgetting his father.

She had never before seen a great English house, and she gazed at it in silence, forgetting her companion. She was impressed by the peace and dignity of what she saw. For centuries people had lived and died in the shelter of this verdant park, and they had loved one another, and their children had been born and bred there, and had fed the peacocks near the lake, and later left their home—the sons to fight, the daughters to marry, carrying with them the memory of Camelos. She visualized those smiling meadows animated with the pale shapes of people long dead, who laughed and talked together,

and were gay; while a shadow fell relentlessly upon the sundial, and the stable clock boomed, even as curricles clattered up to the front door, and those ghosts sprang out, laughing, who were no more, now, than a handful of dust.

Somehow this thought, persisting in her mind, became oddly distasteful. She must have conjured from some dimly remembered Watteau picture this vision of a forgotten *fête champêtre* with which to animate the green meadows of Camelos, but the image persisted, crystal-clear, in her mind. Even the splashing of a hidden fountain seemed to echo the careless laughter of people who had long ago been dead. For one frightened second she could have sworn she heard the tinkle of a spinet sound faintly from some shuttered room, and, as she watched the changeless sundial, a peacock called out, raucously, and then the stable clock boomed, in a deep, mellow tone that had sounded for more than a hundred years.

"Jolly sort of atmosphere," proclaimed a voice from beside her.

She started; she had forgotten him. She felt as though she had been alone for an eternity.

"You're shivering," Reggie declared. "If you're cold, you've only got to say so."

She laughed.

"A ghost walked over my grave."

"Oh. . ."

He was thoroughly disgruntled. He had tried to make himself pleasant to his cousin, but it was impossible. She looked attractive, but she was what he called stand-offish. He yawned openly.

"It's tea-time. We'd better get back."

"All right."

They drove away from Camelos in silence.

■

CHAPTER XXI

MARTINA WAS RESCUED a few days later.

During the course of these few days her life had not been easy. It seemed to her as though she had no time whatever for herself. When she was not answering Uncle Gregory's letters she was washing Topsy, or taking her for a walk, or helping Aunt Mabel to price frowzy garments for a jumble-sale. Reggie no longer seemed interested in her, after that first drive. He amused himself golfing.

She could not imagine what she had done to offend him, until she recollected that he had tried to kiss her. But Reggie's kiss seemed more unreal to her than her own vision of that ghostly picnic in the hayfields of Camelos. She shrugged her shoulders, and bravely offered to darn his socks—he was out at the time—and she wondered what would happen if George forgot her.

She sat on, in the dining-room, some time later, struggling with these socks. She had escaped on purpose. The lack of privacy in the Seton household was almost the worst horror with which she had to contend. She knew that within a few minutes she would be recalled, but she remained in the window-seat, trying her eyes, hating everything and everybody.

When Reggie came in to find her, she could have killed him.

"What on earth are you doing here?" he inquired boisterously.

"Darning. Haven't you got eyes in your head?"

He proved, forthwith, that he had eyes.

"Good God!" he cried, plunging his hands into the basket, "not—not my socks!"

"Look out!" she cried, "you're upsetting everything!"

But he fell on his knees, clasping her waist.

"Not *my* socks! I can't bear that! Oh, Martina—I do love you so! Look—I haven't pestered you, have I? But you know I'm mad about you! You *shall* kiss me, too! Yes, you shall! I've waited, haven't I? Kiss me, do you hear?"

"I beg your pardon," twittered a voice, as they struggled together on the window-seat.

Aunt Mabel stood palpitating upon the dining-room threshold.

"Really!" she exclaimed, and then: "I had a message, you know! Yes—I had a message!"

Martina extricated herself with violence.

"A message, did you say? Was it for Reggie, or for me?"

Reggie, by this time, had shambled to his feet.

"For me," he mumbled, "the message, I mean. Golf, to-morrow. . . ."

Aunt Mabel quelled him with one reproving glance. She was trembling.

"The message," she declared, "is not for you, Reggie. Not for you at all. It's for Martina. From Lord Barradale. He's on the telephone, now!"

Martina fled from the room.

Aunt Mabel and Reggie were left, facing one another. The darning-basket lay overturned between them.

"Well!" she exclaimed mechanically. Just as mechanically, they both knelt down to replace its contents.

Aunt Mabel announced, with emphasis:

"I must say, I'm surprised!"

"What do you mean?" Reggie asked sullenly. He would have been wiser to remain silent.

"I mean," Aunt Mabel quivered, "that if I'd done so, at Martina's age, I'd have been severely punished! That's what I mean!"

"Done so? Done what?" Reggie imprudently questioned.

"Hidden myself in here, to meet you! Almost in the dark! Hugging! What will the servants think? What *can* they think——"

"Oh, shut up, you old cow!" said Reggie very distinctly, and walked out of the room, thereby precipitating a major crisis in the household.

Meanwhile, Martina was speaking to George on the telephone, which was in the hall, and consequently unpleasantly public. She was too excited to know that her Aunt Hester, the door ajar, was listening eagerly to the conversation.

"How are you, darling?" George asked.

"Oh, fair . . . and you?"

"I'm at Camelos, my sweet. I arrived half an hour ago. When am I going to see you?"

"Whenever you like!"

"That sounds fine! I suppose to-night's impossible?"

"Oh, no—no good at all! I'll tell you why when I see you."

"What about lunch to-morrow?"

"I'd love that."

"All right. I'll send the car for you at one to-morrow."

"Yes. Are you—have you got a party?"

"A party?" He sounded amused. "Do you think I'd bring a party when I want to see you? Don't be silly! Darling, I'm alone here! I came down only to be with you."

Nothing else mattered.

"You haven't rung off, Martina?"

"No! That will be lovely. Lovely!"

"Do you love me at all, Martina?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Is it difficult to speak where you are?"

"Very! Do you understand?"

"I understand," he reassured her. "To-morrow, then, and God bless you! Good night."

"Good night."

She went into the drawing-room then, where the family were assembled, looking somewhat self-conscious.

"That was Lord Barradale," she announced, her eyes brilliant, her cheeks poppy-flushed. She was too inexperienced to conceal the joy she felt.

"What's he want?" Uncle Gregory asked abruptly, darting his head, tortoise-like, from a carapace of festooned newspapers.

"I have to lunch with him to-morrow. He's sending the car for me."

Aunt Hester asked, knitting, with an almost casual tranquillity:

"Do you know why he wants you to lunch, child?"

Martina glanced at them.

Uncle Gregory, gaping, and Reggie staring at her reproachfully, as though he were a deceived husband—Aunt Hester knitting, with a pursed mouth. Aunt Mabel, blinking, shaking—her face very pale, two scarlet patches upon her cheek-bones. Topsy, that distasteful dog—with goggling eyes, and a lolling tongue.

Looking at them, she offered them her lie contemptuously. She might have been throwing a coin to beggars.

"Lord Barradale," she said, "wants to talk business with me. . . . I'm going to bed now. Good night."

She swept out of the room—she knew how to sweep—and was therefore fortunate enough to be spared the subsequent scene between Aunt Mabel and Reggie. It was a dreadful little scene.

"I tell you I didn't insult her!" Reggie shouted, eyes glaring behind his glasses.

"He did! He did!" Aunt Mabel sobbed, "and I don't care what he pretends—I'm telling the truth—honour bright! There he was at the window-seat, and she was—she was—well, she was sort of cuddled in his arms! They didn't hear me, either! Not until I coughed, they didn't hear me!"

"What have you got to say?" Uncle Gregory growled to Reggie.

"Why should I tell any of you anything?" Reggie bellowed.

Aunt Hester, still calm, folded her knitting and replaced it in a bag.

She spoke, as though to herself, her lips thin:

"She must go," she said, "that's it—she must go. I

blame myself. She should never have come here in the first place. Never ! ”

She switched off the lights, and whistled to Topsy. By this time she was alone with her husband. Aunt Mabel had run, sobbing, from the room, while Reggie flung himself into the garden, banging the door behind him.

“ Here’s a pretty kettle of fish ! ” the doctor grumbled.

“ Nonsense ! ”

“ I wish I could think it was nonsense. ”

“ I tell you it is. She shall go. The sooner the better. Of all the wicked, sly——”

“ Where will she go ? ” Uncle Gregory demanded with a groan, blowing out his cheeks.

“ Where I say,” Aunt Hester declared, pushing the reluctant Topsy into her basket, “ what does it matter to you ? She’s not your niece, is she ? ”

“ But, Hester, you can’t——”

“ Can’t I ? ” She faced her husband, her lips invisible. “ I’m going to find some situation for that girl if it takes me all to-morrow ! She’s crooked—she’s Sholto over again ! To think of her hiding to make love to Reggie ! ”

“ Good God ! ” Uncle Gregory protested, “ you’ve only Mabel’s word for seeing what she did. And Mabel——”

“ What about Lord Barradale ? ” Aunt Hester interrupted in a hissing whisper. “ If you’d only *heard* their conversation, instead of burying yourself in your newspapers——”

“ Well, you only heard one end of it,” her husband reminded her, reasonably enough, moving towards the staircase.

“ Maybe,” his wife agreed grimly, “ but her voice—I’ll never forget her voice ! Of all the—well—I don’t want to be coarse, but, really—passionate was the only word for it ! I was never more horrified in all my life. Never ! And just after she’d been flirting with Reggie ! The sooner she goes away from here the better ! Really—two of them in one day ! And the impudence of her ! The idea—the very idea of speaking in that familiar tone to Lord Barradale ! ”

“ Well,” he yawned, trying vainly to manœuvre his wife

upstairs, "you can't tell me Barradale's never encouraged her, in that case? Reggie of course has, but that's neither here nor there. All the same . . . this Barradale business——"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" she snapped. "You know as well as I do Lord Barradale's in love with his wife! The whole county knows that!"

"Barradale scarcely ever comes near the county, so what they know about his private life, I'm damned if I can say. Anyway, it's late, and so——"

"All right!" she interrupted. "Shut your eyes, if you must!" She sank her voice to a whisper, and spoke with an eager cruelty which vaguely revolted him: "But mark my words, Gregory—just mark my words! That girl's rotten! She's no good—she's wanton, through and through! I'm sure, in the past——"

It was his turn to interrupt.

Puffy and sloppy as he was, he spoke with a touch of dignity.

"Shut up, Hester," he said, "I don't want to hear any more. If you feel like that, the sooner you send the girl away, the better. Then you can say what you like about her. But at the moment she's here, under your care, and, after all, she's your niece—not mine. Let her alone!"

He went slowly up to bed.

Following him, indignant but mute, his wife thought:

'Even Gregory! Even he stands up for her! She's made trouble for the whole house! She must go!'

Martina herself, unconscious, lay dreaming on her pillows. There she slept, rose-flushed, one arm thrown across her face, and smiled in her sleep, knowing that she was so soon to meet George.

The distant clock from Camelos struck midnight without breaking into her dreams, and she no longer remembered those ghostly shapes laughing together in the hayfields beyond the park. If they laughed together still, in another, more gracious yesterday, while the great clock ticked away their time, she was indifferent, for when her lips parted, and she turned, happily, in her sleep, she was thinking only of George.

CHAPTER XXII

MARTINA STOOD ON the threshold of a vast, silvery-tinted room, that was dusky, its blinds being drawn, and still sweet with the heavy scent of lilies.

"The Silver Drawing Room," George said; he stood beside her, his hand clasping hers.

"It's magnificent."

He laughed.

"It's an awful sham, really—an early Victorian copy of an Adams room. But they did it well, I must admit, and there are some fine things in it. I hate lacquer, personally, but those lacquer cabinets are supposed to be faultless. And there are some good pictures here—this Velasquez Dwarf, and this Holbein."

Still hand in hand, they crossed a huge white bearskin rug.

"And here," he said, "is a Canaletto, and that means I shall have to kiss you, because, if it hadn't been for Venice, we should never have known one another. . . ."

He kissed her in the dimness of the Silver Drawing Room, and she clung to him for a moment, with a sigh, before she pushed him gently away. She had much to say to him.

"Have we seen the library yet?" she asked.

"No, come on—we've time before lunch. By the way, we're lunching in the Gun Room—it's more agreeable there, for the two of us."

She followed him without a word. She had never before seen him so carefree. He strode ahead of her, tall, long-limbed, graceful, his hair bright in the sunlight streaming through the great window in the hall.

"Here we are," he said.

She looked into another great, majestic room, lined with so many books so that its rich, warm colouring came more from their varied and mellow bindings than from the rose-red brocade curtains.

She asked, puzzled :

"Is this room old or new?"

"New. That is, Victorian. But the hall is Queen Anne, you know. And that's Queen Anne with plenty of eighteenth-century meddling—very lovely, too! Don't you think? What's the matter, darling?"

"I thought," she said, in some perplexity, "that the library was much smaller?"

He shook his head.

"No. I never told you that. It's been like this for fifty years, I suppose."

"It isn't a bit as I imagined it," she declared, looking about her earnestly.

"I'm sorry," he said gravely, his blue eyes twinkling.

She looked at him and squeezed his hand.

"This is really the only library at Camelos?"

"The sole and only one. I do apologize, Martina. What can I do to make up?"

She laughed.

"I can only think of lunch," he said, "and that's cold. But I think it's going to be a good lunch. Do you drink claret, by the way?"

"I do."

"The claret's all right, anyway. Come on, and let's eat."

In the Gun Room, small and square, its panelled walls hung with hunting-prints and antlers, they sat alone for their first intimate meal together since the far-away Venetian days.

"I thought we'd have a picnic," he said, "so that we could talk without being disturbed by servants . . . tell me about the Setons, first. How bad is it?"

"Oh, I can't bear it," she declared. "I can't stay there much longer, George, really I can't. There was a row this

morning. Aunt Hester—she can be very cruel, you know—she told me I was wanton ! ”

“ As bad as that ! ” he teased. “ Really, Martina, you must have behaved yourself very ill ! How dare you be wanton when I’m not there ? You’d better confess the whole story ! ”

She told him, with a mixture of resentment and humour.

“ You see,” she finished, “ if it wasn’t for Aunt Mabel and Reggie, I might have endured it for a little longer. But those two ! Aunt Mabel’s like a great, pale, blundering moth—not like a person at all. And Reggie——”

“ An ill-conditioned oaf,” he told her, his face darkening.

“ Oh, he’s harmless ! But you see, it’s like nothing I’ve ever known before, and I’ve known some terrible places with Father. But this . . . it seems to smother you ! And they think it strange if you want to be alone ! That’s odd of them, isn’t it ? ”

“ My darling, you needn’t worry, because you’re not going to stay there many days longer. That I promise you ! ”

“ Oh ? ” She looked at him directly. “ Then what’s going to happen to me ? Where am I to go, pray ? ”

“ You love me, don’t you ? ”

“ Do I have to tell you that ? But——”

“ There are no ‘buts,’ ” he informed her, serious again ; “ this has gone too far now for any pretence. You’re coming away with me—for good. We’re never going to be separated again.”

She shook her head, looking at him through a mist of sudden, stinging tears. At last he had said what she wanted, and she forced herself to refuse.

“ You know that’s impossible. I’ll do anything else you want, but I can’t run away with you. How can I ? Isabel and your father——”

He cut her short.

“ This business,” he said coldly, “ concerns only you and me.”

“ It doesn’t, George ! You’re not free ! How can you run away with me ? Where would we go ? ”

"I make more money than you seem to think, painting. And I've my mother's money. We'd live on that easily."

"Thanks!" she said with spirit. "None of your friends would speak to you, and you'd miss them, after a time. They'd all be on Isabel's side, and I don't see how anyone could blame them. We'd creep about all over the world together, being cut by everyone you used to know. You've never been cut—you don't know what it's like! It's hell! I'm not worth that—George—nobody in the world is!"

"Then," he said stiffly, for he could never brook opposition, "are you suggesting that I should live with you in London as my mistress?"

"Isn't that the only way out?"

"It is not," he retorted, glacial. "If you think I intend to treat you as an incident, you're richly mistaken. You seem to think I've precious little respect for you, or for myself, come to that! Do you really imagine that in those circumstances I could go on sharing the same house as Isabel?"

She brushed her tears angrily away.

"If I'm not too proud, I can't see why you should be!"

"Listen," he said, looking intently at her, "if I can get a divorce from Isabel, will you marry me?"

"Do you think I wouldn't give my eyes to marry you?"

"That's no answer to my question. Will you, if I can get a divorce, marry me?"

"All right," she answered, after a pause, sadly, "it's a safe promise. She'll never set you free."

"I shall go up and see Isabel to-night," George informed her deliberately, "and I'll come back to-morrow evening to tell you what she says. Will you dine with me here, to-morrow?"

"Yes, of course. It'll be difficult, but I'm not going to stay there. I don't mind a row."

"You're certainly not going to stay there. But can't you tell your aunt I've got your father's papers to go through with you?"

"She knows he didn't leave any papers," Martina pointed out, "and I'm not twenty-one yet. I'm only twenty. If anyone had to go through papers with you it would be Aunt Hester, not me."

"Well, make some other excuse!" he told her in his high-handed way, and then, with a swift tenderness: "You're not crying, are you? I could kick myself! But I want you so much—you'll never know how much! I can't bear waiting for you, Martina! I *can't* wait—much longer!"

She said gently:

"You haven't got to wait for me . . . really. . . ."

He made a quick, impatient gesture.

"I'm damned if I'm going to treat you like that! I'm not going to have some shady love-affair with you if I can get you any other way!"

"In the studio you said——"

"Damn the studio! I lost my head! It was the first time I'd been alone with you since Venice. I've come to my senses now!"

She went over to him, and put her arms round his neck. For some time they stayed quietly together, without speaking, as she stroked his forehead. It was so hot that she thought him feverish, and said as much, softly.

"No," he told her, "it's just that I get upset."

"When you don't get your own way? I know that, darling. I've known it since the beginning."

He caught her hands, and kissed them.

"Let's go out into the garden. . . ."

The April day, that had been so fair, was clouding now as they walked out onto the lawn.

"That's a shame," he said suddenly, "it's going to rain, and I wanted so much to show you something."

"What? Can't we see it even if it rains?"

He shook his head.

"No. It's too far. It's a place I'm very fond of—a Belvedere, a little temple, up in the woods behind the Lake. That's old, if you like—it's supposed to be Queen Anne, but

I've a suspicion it dates back further. Never mind, I'll show it to you another time."

The stable clock struck three, a chime of measured peals.

"That sounds old," she observed, slipping her arm in his.

"It is. The clock tower in the stables is early eighteenth century."

"I don't like it," Martina said, "it means that soon you'll have to take me back."

"Not yet! Come down by the lake—in a day or two that hill behind will be gold with daffodils. And there's the temple there—that patch of white. Do you see?"

She nodded.

They crossed the lawn together.

Looking over the clear waters of the lake, that were fringed with rushes, and darkly shadowed by overhanging trees, she tried for a moment to divorce herself from his presence, and to think coolly of their future.

She supposed that she would ruin him, no matter what they did together, and she wished then that her love was great enough for her to leave him for ever. But it was not. How could she leave him for those social reasons of which she was entirely ignorant? Long ago, as a child, she had sworn that she would never marry him, no matter what happened. Now, four years later, she was not so sure. She knew something of her power, now, and she knew more of him. He would never be happy without her—of that she was certain. She was sorry for Isabel and for his father, but there was really no reason why she should consider them. They would never consider her.

And yet, if she threw in her lot with his, she was afraid that he might regret their exile. He was accustomed to so many splendid things that she could never give him. His friends would accuse her of having dragged him down. He would grow tired and discontented. Perhaps in the end he would learn to hate her. But that was a risk she had to take. After this brief reflection, she decided that she was prepared to gamble.

"You're very silent," he said.

"Yes, but you needn't worry. I was thinking about us. George, I'll do anything you want! Now do you believe I love you?"

A white peacock, dragging its silver tail like a languid train, picked its way across the lawn in front of them, as he took her in his arms, looking down at her.

"You'll never regret saying that. . . ."

She said nothing. What could she say? She was more experienced, less trustful, than he; her life had prepared her more for adversity than for pleasure; yet she herself was made for pleasure. In his arms her body melted, becoming the willing instrument of all that he most wanted. She knew, instinctively, that she could please him; generations of Saracen and Cornish ancestors were mingled in her blood. She was more primitive than he, oddly enough, more honest, where her emotions were concerned. And her lips were like sun-warmed fruit.

"No!" he said at last, rather unsteadily, "not now—not here. I told you! I love you too much. We've got to wait."

"All right."

He told her, after a pause:

"I'm going to speak to Isabel, first."

She shrugged her shoulders, conveying a supreme indifference.

She walked across to the edge of the lake, and began abstractedly to throw stones into the water. Her back was rigid.

He followed her. He was agitated.

"Somebody's got to look after you!"

"Very well," she agreed, without turning round.

"Just wait until to-morrow," he promised.

"And if Isabel says no? Where's to-morrow then?"

He joined her, skimming a stone across the lake. He watched its flight intently.

"She'll have had a chance, by then. And if she says no—well, I can't care, personally. You see . . . I don't think it's

I—George—she really likes. She likes what she thought I was going to be. And I could never be that. Did you ever play ducks and drakes, Martina? Look—watch this one!”

Martina murmured:

“I wish to-morrow would come soon—that’s all! Everything means waiting!”

The stable clock suddenly boomed the half-hour, and she started.

“That damned clock again!” he exclaimed. “I suppose I must take you home.”

“Home! Yes, I’d better go.”

He put her down outside the Setons’ door, and said:

“I’ll let you know what time, to-morrow evening.”

Suddenly she was afraid. She felt so cold that she shook. She caught at his sleeve.

“Suppose you don’t come for me? What shall I do then? I can’t stay here, you know—even if I hadn’t got you, I couldn’t do that!”

“You deserve to be put over my knee,” he told her, kissing her as he spoke, and he added:

“To-morrow, darling. God bless you.”

“God bless you!”

His engines roared as he drove away towards London.

CHAPTER XXIII

ISABEL WAS TRYING to write letters in her sitting-room at Cheyne Walk.

She had spent two hours writing one letter—to her father.

Now she looked ruefully at the brief page in her hand.

"I can't give you a definite date because George is away at the moment, and I'd rather you came to dinner when he is here. Directly he comes back I'll let you know."

Here the telephone rang, and she discovered Lord Herries at the other end.

"I hear," Lord Herries shouted, "George isn't at home. I've tried the studio, and I've tried two clubs. Where the devil is he?"

"He's at Camelos," Isabel replied calmly, "but I expect him back before dinner. Shall I tell him to ring you up at about ten?"

"Certainly not! I shan't be in. What's he doing at Camelos? Eh? What's that you say? I can't hear you!"

"You'd better ask him," Isabel said, trying to suppress the bitterness from her voice. "I expect he had some business there—he didn't tell me what it was."

"Oh, indeed! Well, I want him to ring me before eleven to-morrow morning. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Good night."

A few minutes later she heard the front door bang, and George came into the sitting-room.

She watched him beneath her lashes.

He was bright-eyed, pale, and obviously enchanted.

"Hullo!" he said, crossing to the fire, where he stood warming his hands. "It's cold, isn't it? I was cold, driving."

"Are you in to dinner?" she asked.

She lit a cigarette, partly to quiet her nerves.

"Yes," he said, "yes. That is, if you want me!"

And he looked sideways at her, with his charming smile.

"Want you! What a funny thing to say! What do you mean?"

He stopped smiling, but continued to regard her out of the corner of his eye.

"I'd like awfully to speak to you about something," he said.

She managed to produce a smile.

"Well! Come on, then! Is it so very important?"

"Yes," he said, "it is."

He turned towards her impulsively, but his eyes were wary. His voice sounded pleading.

"Isabel! Can't you guess what I want?"

"No," she said, "I'm afraid I can't. What is it you want?"

"Oh," he said, staring at her intently, "you must know—you're too intelligent not to know! I want to marry Martina Forest."

She was prepared for some confession of adultery, but for this she was not prepared.

"That's a strange thing to tell me," she said, after a pause, fighting for time.

"Is it so strange? Didn't you know that I loved her?"

"No. Not to that extent! When did this infatuation become so serious?"

"It always has been serious," he told her, as though appealing to her common sense, "ever since we knew each other. Yes! Ever since then!"

"Do you mean since you were in Venice?"

He nodded.

"You were in love with her then?"

Again he nodded.

"May I ask why you married me?"

He said nothing.

But she was relentless, and a little like a schoolmistress.

"Why, George?"

"I didn't want to marry you. I didn't want to marry anyone then. But——"

"Wouldn't it have been better to have told me this, when you came back?"

"Yes. No doubt. But it wasn't so easy."

"I see."

She got up, deliberately.

She wore a plain black dress, and the pearls old Herries had given her for a wedding present. They had belonged to George's mother. She looked beautiful and composed in her golden beauty. No one, watching her, could have guessed her despair.

"What do you mean, Isabel? What do you see?"

"I mean this," and she faced him defiantly, "you have the consummate impudence, the moment you fancy some chit of a girl, to come here asking me for a divorce. Well, you won't get one! Has that sunk into your brain, or are you too stupid? I'll *never* set you free!"

She tried to open the door, but he stood before it.

"Isabel—wait! For God's sake wait one moment! We can't dismiss this in a few minutes!"

"There's nothing more to say. Will you please get away from that door?"

He looked, she observed in her despair, exactly as he had looked when he was afraid that she would never marry him. Those blue, tired eyes, that tragic face!

"Isabel, you *must* listen! You can't pretend our marriage has been successful! How can you?"

"So it's been a failure, has it? Well, thanks for telling me!"

"Will you please listen? It's not your fault! It's not anyone's fault—it just happened. But it's not Martina's fault, either—I swear it isn't!"

"Oh, I see! It's not her fault? Well, let me tell you, darling, in your innocence, there's an ugly word for women who behave as she has behaved—who break up homes, as she has done! And I'll tell you——"

He interrupted her, beside himself.

"What home have we ever had for her to break up? Tell me that! When have we ever had a home?"

His cruelty staggered her.

"You'll be paid back for this!" she told him in a low voice. "You can't behave as you're behaving without being paid back! One day you'll come to me crawling on your knees!"

He made a mighty effort to control himself.

"Listen," he said hoarsely, still standing in front of the door. "I've made a mess of this—I felt I would! I want to start all over again! Can't we be happy—happier—apart? Couldn't we be friends, then? Surely this marriage of ours has been a nightmare from the start, and for you, far more than for me?"

"I've nothing further to say. Will you go somewhere for dinner? I don't think I could face——"

He insisted, desperately:

"All right! Anything you want! But I *must* make you understand before I go—she—Martina, is blameless in all this! I swear she is! Even to-day she told me——"

Suddenly she hit him savagely across the face.

"Do you know what I think of your Martina—your mistress? I'll tell you!"

And she flung an obscene word at him. She spat this word like any street woman.

And that astonished him more than anything she had said before. She was a woman who hated coarse language. She had never, during their life together, failed to reprove him for swearing. "It's so unnecessary," she had told him a hundred times.

"There!" she said, watching with exultation a red mark flush his cheek-bone.

"All right," he replied, moving away from the door, "only . . . Martina doesn't happen to be my mistress. That's all! But you'd never have the decency to understand that!"

She paused, her hand on the door-knob. And her hand was shaking.

"Bad language is about all you understand, nowadays, isn't it? That's natural! Well, wait till your father hears about this escapade—just wait! And remember what I said to you a little while ago—I'll never set you free—*never!*"

The door slammed, and he was alone in Isabel's sitting-room.

He sat down, and poured himself a drink.

A few minutes later his butler came to him.

"Are you in for dinner, my lord?"

"No. I want you to pack a suit-case for the night and send it to the studio. I've got to work late."

The man's face was impassive.

"Very good, my lord."

George sat on alone, looking at the fire.

He had failed abominably, and the pity he felt for Isabel seemed almost indecent.

He shivered, then, and suddenly his old, haunted fear of the house returned to fret his nerves.

Here, in this room which had just witnessed the finish of his marriage, he felt, as he had so often felt, that he was not alone, although he sat by himself before the fire. He turned sharply, but, of course, there was nobody, nothing to be seen, only the unpleasant feeling of a sadness, a hopeless sorrow, trying to communicate itself to him.

He sprang to his feet, impatiently lighting a cigarette.

On this night of all nights, at this first moment of freedom, of having broken at last from the prison in which he had been incarcerated, he wanted only to be conscious of his gladness in escaping, in having thrust his way from captivity into the fresh air.

He need never again enter this ill-omened house.

He moved towards the door, and then his pity for Isabel returned to flood his heart. It was sincerely terrible to him to know that he was the deliberate cause of her suffering. He stood for a moment, uncertain; then, walking across to the

writing-table he scribbled a note without even sitting down to do so.

' ISABEL DEAR,

' You'll be so much happier without me. So far as you are concerned, I'm not even worth the scene we've just had. Please forgive me, if you can, for having forced it on you. Our marriage has been a tragic mistake, and I have been to blame from the first. I only hope you'll find happiness somewhere else. Please don't let us part with bitterness—I couldn't bear to think that to-night was our final parting. May I telephone you in a few days' time ?


' GEORGE.'

The clock struck as he left the room.

It struck seven, and the musical notes reminded him vaguely of the majestic, sonorous striking of the great clock at Camelos. He had always hated that clock.

' One day,' he thought, ' I'll have it silenced. . . '

He left the house.



CHAPTER XXIV

THE NEXT DAY, to Martina, was one of anxious uncertainty.

She woke in the morning feeling tense and overstrung. She was certain, quite certain, that Isabel would refuse to divorce George. Isabel loved him. Martina, in her place, would have fought like a tigress to keep him, at any costs. She would have said, she reflected, had she been his wife :

‘ I see you don’t love me at the moment. But your passion for this girl won’t last, and we’ve been married nearly four years. You’ll come back to me, when you’re tired of her. I’m ready to wait.’

Yes, that was what, if she were Isabel——

She started.

Aunt Hester was addressing her.

“ I want to speak to you, Martina. Will you please come into the morning-room ? ”

She recollected, then, that breakfast, on this fateful day, had been more of a nightmare than was usually the case. Uncle Gregory certainly had effaced himself, as always, behind his paper, but Reggie had been unusually glum, and Aunt Hester what Martina described to herself as ‘ sour.’ Aunt Mabel had not appeared. It seemed that she had a headache, and was breakfasting in bed.

Martina followed her aunt reluctantly enough, her lower lip protruding. She was in no mood for a scene.

“ Now,” Aunt Hester declared, shutting the door behind her, “ I intend to get to the bottom of this disgraceful affair yesterday.”

Martina immediately looked almost as guilty as her aunt could have desired. She had entirely forgotten the episode of Reggie and the darning-basket.

"What affair?" she stammered, "what do you mean? I don't know what you're talking about!"

"I believe," Aunt Hester stated, "that you were not actually present when Reggie insulted Aunt Mabel. At the same time, I should like to know exactly what you were doing with him in the dining-room?"

"Doing with him? What do you mean? He came in, when I was darning. He——"

"Martina, it's not the slightest use lying! I intend to get to the bottom of this business, unpleasant though it may be. To start with, you must have arranged to meet him in the dining-room, or you would scarcely have been there at that unusual hour—please don't interrupt until I've finished speaking—and, secondly, Aunt Mabel reports that you were 'kissing and hugging' in each other's arms."

"That's a lie!"

"Kindly don't speak like that to me. If you have anything to say——"

"He tried to kiss me," Martina interrupted sulkily.

"Without any encouragement, I suppose?" Aunt Hester inquired, sarcastically.

"Encouragement!" Martina flamed, swiftly contrasting Reggie's pimples with George's beautiful, sensitive face, "if you think I'd encourage Reggie, you must be mad! He's tried to kiss me before, and I just laugh at him! Who wouldn't? If Aunt Mabel dares to say I was kissing him then she's the biggest liar I ever met—and I'll tell her so the moment I see her!"

No mother likes to be informed that her son is sexually ridiculous. Mrs. Seton was no exception to the rule. Controlling her own temper, she continued quietly:

"If your fit of passion is over I'd like to tell you something else . . . this friendship . . . or flirtation—I don't pretend to know what it is between you and Lord Barradale, must stop immediately. Yesterday you lunched with him alone at Camelos. You spent the entire afternoon with him, alone. That must never happen again. You're not rampaging all over

the place, now, you must remember. You're living in the country, now—the English country. People talk here. It may surprise you to know that they value decency, but they do. You must never go to Camelos again unless Lady Barradale is there. Do you understand ? ”

Meeting Martina's narrowed, emerald gaze she returned it, coolly enough. She, too, was angry.

Her niece demanded :

“ How dare you talk to me about Lord Barradale ? ”

“ I dare, as you call it,” Aunt Hester retorted, “ because I happen to be in a responsible position where you're concerned. You're my niece—Lord Barradale's my neighbour. I'm not going to have a scandal, here. I had enough of scandals with your father ! ”

“ Aunt Hester,” Martina declared, by this time ice-pale, “ I don't want to quarrel with you, because at the moment you're supporting me. But you won't be supporting me much longer. I must go away from here ! I must go away soon. I'd like to go to-day——”

“ I agree with you,” her aunt interrupted coldly. “ You must indeed go away from here—you've repaid our kindness very much as I'd expect your father's daughter to repay it. However, there's no question of your leaving to-morrow, and there's no question of my turning you from my door. I've already written to several organizations with a view to finding you a post. In a few days' time I am sure I shall find you something. After all, with your knowledge of languages there's no reason why—if you behave yourself—you shouldn't find a situation as nursery-governess.”

“ As what ? ”

“ You heard me, I think,” and Aunt Hester's lips were thin.

Martina suddenly burst out laughing. She could not help her laughter. It seemed to her so richly comical that she, the beloved of Barradale, should seriously be recommended to anyone as a nursery-governess. She who, after long reflection, had decided, for better or for worse, to throw in her lot with the god she called George ! She, in all the lovely blossoming of

her youth, to teach French to children, when Barradale desired her !

She turned impetuously, in the midst of her laughter, towards her aunt.

She demanded :

“ Do I *look* like a governess ? ”

For the first time during their interview, Mrs. Seton returned her gaze not only with dislike, but with fear.

Did she look like a governess ?

That lithe body, so graceful, and so voluptuous, those green eyes, that full, beautiful mouth, the fruit-like bloom of her skin, the bronze-dark masses of her hair ? Did she look like a governess ? No, Aunt Hester thought, quailing for the first time—no—a thousand times, no ! What household would ever consent to receive this serpent ? Suddenly she was afraid ; she saw only one future for this child of Sholto's.

She blurted out :

“ I suppose you'd rather go on the streets ? ”

Her coarseness, afterwards, made her uncomfortable ; she did not like to think what Gregory would have had to say to her. But Gregory was not there, and the girl's effrontery frightened her. That effrontery of youth, confidence, and vitality. The spirit of something wild and bright, sprung from Sholto's loins, to defy her as Sholto long ago had done, when they were young, before the 1914 War, and Sholto, grinning, had loafed away to fight, unlike his ancestors, as a private. She had been stupid enough, then, to think he had behaved disgracefully. She knew better now, and before the end of the War Sholto had become a captain. And then everything had gone wrong, including Sholto. How sad it was, and what a brilliant boy he had been—before the War !

But for her brother's unknown Italian wife she only had resentment. Not for any definite reason, but because she wanted to blame, someone for his disgraceful career, and the Italian girl would do. And it seemed as though the Italian girl were reincarnated in her own daughter. Martina and Teresa were as one, in her mind, that morning. They repre-

sented freedom, colour, carelessness—everything she had never known. Everything that, being Sholto's sister, she would perhaps have liked to know. And, being his sister, she was not without sadism.

So she repeated, since Martina only stared at her :

" I suppose you'd rather go on the streets ? "

Martina was sincerely shocked. She, who was accustomed to every possible licence, had thought, in her innocence, that ' real ladies ' were incapable of such remarks. And she had thought of Aunt Hester as a lady. Now, however, perceiving that she had been ill-informed, she collected herself enough to reply, with a desperate and infuriating calm :

" Oh, no ! I don't have to do that, thank you, any more than I have to become a governess ! Don't worry ! I can look after myself ! "

Aunt Hester came close to her, so close that, despite her boldness, she nearly shrank away. But she controlled herself. She looked, fearlessly, at Aunt Hester's hard, dark eyes, at her red, shining cheeks, and her thin lips. It was repulsive, to be so near Aunt Hester. She could even see beads of sweat on the faint, dark moustache above the woman's mouth.

Her aunt said, hoarsely :

" You shameless little liar ! Have you the effrontery to stand there and tell me Barradale's keeping you ? "

Martina did not retreat, even then, although she was so frightened. She was frightened because her aunt, that impeccable, correct machine, was suddenly transformed into her father, and she had thought her father's ghost forever laid.

She replied, unflinching, despite her fears :

" If you say that again I'll go to Uncle Gregory—now, in the surgery ! He'll give you hell, for talking to me as you've done. I wish he'd beat you ! "

" How dare you——"

" I'm not afraid of you. And I'm going, soon, from here—you needn't worry ! I wouldn't stay with you if you went on your knees ! You're a hateful woman ! As for Aunt Mabel, she ought to have had a husband years ago ! And Reggie

needs a mistress ! I hope one day he'll find one ! You're all awful ! But *you*—you're the worst of all ! You're nearly as bad as my father, and I wish you knew how much I hated him ! ”

She ran from the room, upstairs. There, in her bedroom, after having locked the door, she burst into a fit of passionate tears. Her nerves had been on edge before this horrible scene with Aunt Hester, but now she was terrified out of her wits. In her crude youthfulness, she had thought, instinctively, of her aunt as a ‘good woman,’ but her aunt had shocked her more than anyone she had ever known. Sobbing, her face buried in pillows, she thought that she far preferred her father, despite his shameless, shameful cadging, his cruelty, and his cynicism. Anything, she decided, despairing, was better than the coarseness of a genteel woman.

Then she thought of George, and her anxieties returned, all the more fearful since the strain of that recent nerve-racking interview. Supposing that between them—Isabel and his father—they persuaded him never to see her again ? Nothing, she felt, was more probable. She was keenly aware of his weakness, for she knew him, now, all too well. His weakness frightened her. She knew, too, how much he hated inflicting pain. And he was not only hurting Isabel, but his father. She wondered if he would ever have the courage to endure what he had to do. She had never seen Lord Herries, although she knew of George's affection for the old gentleman. But, thinking of Isabel, she visualized once again that woman whose beauty had so much impressed her at Cheyne Walk. Then it seemed to her, in a fit of savage humiliation, that George could never forsake his wife for her.

She herself was willing to live with him while he still continued to share a house with Isabel. She could not, if he had asked this of her, have denied him for a moment. But he had never asked it. On the contrary, he seemed to think such an idea insulting to her. She sighed. She was a materialist ; he, an idealist.

She stayed a long time brooding in her bedroom. Finally she washed her face, and packed a few necessities in a bag.

No matter what happened that night—whether George came back to her or not—she could not remain beneath the same roof as her Aunt Hester.

The lunch-gong sounded, and she went down to share a dismal meal with her aunt and with Reggie. Uncle Gregory was away at the hospital. Aunt Mabel, still unable to believe that her nephew had called her an old cow, continued to sulk in bed.

Martina and Aunt Hester avoided one another, distastefully, during this appalling meal.

Reggie made disastrous attempts at conversation.

"So you aren't coming with us, this afternoon, Martina?"

"With you? Where?"

"To the Ormiston's. They're only twenty miles away, you know, if you drive through Oxford. They're right up on the Downs."

"Martina's busy this afternoon," Aunt Hester informed her son frigidly.

Martina gave her a mutinous look.

"No, I'm not. Why do you say that, Aunt Hester? I've got nothing to do at all. I'm looking forward to being on my own. I don't want to come out with you! But I'm not busy!"

Reggie flushed scarlet, and looked at his plate.

Aunt Hester, ignoring her, said to him:

"Do you mind calling Soames, dear? The bell seems out of order. . . ."

Soames, the parlourmaid, duly appeared with tinned peaches and custard.

Martina sat and scowled at her plate.

At last she said:

"Can I go, Aunt Hester? I don't want to eat this, and I'd rather go, when you keep pretending I'm not here!"

"Do as you please," Aunt Hester agreed, coldly.

Martina went into the drawing-room.

She went across to the windows.

The skies were overcast, and a light rain spat angrily against the panes.

Everything to her seemed grey and desolate. She could not believe, then, that George would ever come back to her.

She slipped up to her bedroom, and remained there until she heard Reggie drive his mother away to those festivities on the other side of Oxford.

Then she came downstairs.

For the first time since her arrival, she was alone in the house.

While she fidgeted in the drawing-room, the telephone rang, and she went out to answer it in the hall.

CHAPTER XXV

SHE KNEW, INSTINCTIVELY, that George was on the other end of the line.

"Hullo?"

"Is that you, Martina?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yes."

"Listen, I can't get down for dinner, to-night. . . ."

"Oh . . ."

Desolation filled her heart.

"You see, I have to dine with my father. But I shall be down by eleven. Can I fetch you, or would you rather I waited outside the house?"

"You'd better wait. Please don't ring the bell! I'll be watching for you. Has—have things been very difficult for you?"

"Yes," he said, then, in a tiny distant voice that came to her from sixty miles away, "I've had a pretty difficult time . . . but there's nothing at all to worry about . . . absolutely nothing. I'll be waiting for you outside the house at eleven. . . . God bless you, darling. . . ."

"Good-bye, George."

She felt restless and worried. She called Topsy, and went out for a long, dreary walk. The overcast skies were as grey as goose-feathers, and a dry wind rustled the trees and hedgerows.

When she returned she went into the drawing-room. It was cold, and the windows rattled. She went across to the fire-place, staring distastefully at the fan of white pleated paper reposing in the grate.

While she was trying to decide if it was worth while to lay

and light a fire, the door opened and Aunt Mabel came into the room. Martina, who had forgotten her existence, gave her a quick, resentful look. Aunt Mabel wore a tweed skirt that dipped behind, a bright pink cardigan, and a high-boned collar. Her pale hair was, as usual, tidily disposed beneath a net. She started, slightly, when she saw Martina, but, as though determined to confront this tigress, she marched forward into the room, saying :

"Excuse me, but I believe you answered the telephone this afternoon ?"

"Yes," Martina muttered. She was certain that she could not endure another scene.

"Who was it ?"

"Someone wanted me."

"That doesn't tell me very much, does it ?" Aunt Mabel suggested.

"It wasn't meant to," Martina replied, in a low voice.

"Your Aunt Hester will want to know if Lord Barradale has been telephoning ?"

"It's not her business, if he has."

"I should think," Aunt Mabel declared, "you'd be ashamed of behaving so rudely and ungratefully !"

"Well, if it comes to that you aren't ashamed of telling lies about me yesterday !"

Two red spots pricked Aunt Mabel's cheeks.

"That," she stated, her voice trembling, "is an episode I—I'd rather not discuss with you, if you don't mind ! But——"

"Oh," Martina cried, with a gesture of desperate appeal, "can't any of you leave me alone ?"

She was overstrung and depressed. She was not far from tears. But Aunt Mabel was a foolish woman, and she had no imagination. She saw no pathos in the defenceless position of this girl. What she did see, with an odd compound of repulsion and fascination, was a creature supposed to be 'wanton.' Looking almost slyly at the drooping figure before her she visualized Martina as a temptress, as a low, immoral

character who had not only tried to seduce Reggie, but who was shamelessly living with Lord Barradale! This latter supposition was, of course, the one which interested her the most; it was so wicked! Those poor, happy young Barradales—how clearly she remembered their radiant appearance at the garden-party at Camelos that last summer! To visualize such infamy as Martina's close at hand was, while horrifying, a new, rich experience. When did they meet, and how? Did they really think themselves in love? How, in the beginning, had she ever managed to catch him?

Another, unfamiliar emotion came clashing to confuse her excited mind—jealousy. No man had ever desired her. This young, warm-blooded creature knew so many secrets that she would never know, would die without knowing. This girl, who might, had she been more fortunate, have existed as her own daughter, could have told her much that she longed to know. This girl was desired by men, and pleased them; she was accustomed to caresses and to passionate words and passionate scenes. She seemed, to the woman watching her, the sinister incarnation of insolent youth.

"Leave you alone!" Aunt Mabel cried, after a long pause, "leave you alone—when you're corrupting a married man! Really——"

She stopped; for she herself was alone. Martina reached the door with a swift, violent movement, and slammed it behind her. She ran upstairs, once again, to seek sanctuary in her bedroom.

Aunt Mabel murmured to herself and opened the window. She was stifled in that cold room.

Then, too late, she felt a faint sympathy for this unwanted and turbulent personality. She thought of Barradale's beautiful face and of herself as a girl. Would she have known how to resist his charm? Could any young woman resist him? And the girl who had just fled from her less than anyone, for she was Forest's daughter.

For a moment Aunt Mabel fought with herself. The good, healthy part of her nature almost compelled her to follow

Martina upstairs. She would have liked to say, in the stumbling words of her kind :

" I'm so sorry for you, dear ! He's so handsome, yes . . . and so dangerous. . . . I understand why you're in love with him—anyone would be ! And I'm sorry for you because you're strange, and don't understand our ways, and I know Aunt Hester's been hard on you . . . but that needn't stop us being friends, need it ? "

If she had gone upstairs then, and spoken her mind impetuously to Martina, the history of many people would have been changed—so vastly changed that she herself could scarcely have comprehended the immensity of purpose that for one trembling second lay within her power.

Her natural instinct of kindliness lasted only for a moment. She had lived too long with the domineering Hester, she was too repressed, too much dominated by the worst influences of the middle classes. She looked out of the window, across the pale meadows, and then what she thought of as her weakness ebbed away from her, and her bleak strength returned. How could she ever have wished to protect Martina ? She thought, then, that for a minute she had been mad.

The girl was evil. That was the end of the matter. The pirate's daughter resumed her original status in Aunt Mabel's mind ; what Isabel's distracted fancies had transformed into a robber-girl became, with Aunt Mabel, something too reckless even to think of with sanity.

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In London, George was talking to his father.

He explained, exhausted :

" You see, my mind's made up."

" If you do this," old Herries told him, " you'll never get another penny from me. Nor will you ever be allowed near Camelos."

" I thought you'd say that."

" Incidentally, although it probably won't affect you, I'll never get over it. Never ! I'll never see you again."

George said nothing.

At length old Herries muttered :

" If it was for a woman of birth, or breeding, I'd not mind so much. But this——"

" It's no use abusing her."

" Probably not. Well, you married against my wishes. Now, against my wishes, you intend to break up your marriage. But I shall warn Isabel never to divorce you. My God ! You'll come crawling back to her, six months from now !"

George got up.

" Then there's nothing more to be said."

" Are you mad ?" his father suddenly demanded, not in a blustering manner, but softly, not even looking at him.

" No. I wish you'd believe I'm not. This—this business with Martina isn't just a temporary infatuation. It's the most important thing that's ever happened to me."

Old Herries got up.

" Lord Byron," he said, " a young man of fashion like yourself, never allowed himself, if I remember rightly, to be dominated by women. On the contrary, he dominated them. If you must behave like a libertine, take a page from his book ! Be a clever rake !"

" I'm not a rake."

" Better a rake than a fool ! Do you still refuse to return to your wife ?"

" Yes."

" Then get out !"

George hesitated ; it was impossible not to notice the glitter of tears on his father's face.

" Get out, I say !"

" Good-bye," George said, and went out of the house.

He climbed into his car and started the engines. He drove away, the sound of their humming roar in his ears, and thought that this was the more bitter parting of the two. Like Martina, he could not endure any more. The long car slid through the traffic out on to the Western Avenue. He would be early, for his appointment.

CHAPTER XXVI

MARTINA, SHUT IN her bedroom, pulled out the valise she had packed earlier in the day. It was light enough for her to carry with ease.

Then, suddenly, in a fit of nervous impetuosity, she unpacked the case. She would go to him without anything that could remind her of the past. She slipped a toothbrush and a powder-puff into the pocket of her camel-hair coat, and then, on the wings of another impulse, an idea came to her that was one day to be of enormous benefit to George. It was, before the curtain fell upon their drama, to save not only his name, but perhaps his life. She herself had no idea of the importance of what she did. She acted entirely upon impulse. She did not want the members of this household to know, one moment before they must, that she had run away with Barradale.

So she scribbled on a piece of note-paper :

‘It’s better for everyone for me to go away. I’m going to-night. I shall go abroad, and none of you will ever see me again.

‘MARTINA.’

She addressed the envelope to Mrs. Seton, and left it, like the heroine of any play, upon the dressing-table.

She had twelve pounds left from the twenty discovered in Forest’s note-case ; she put this money in her bag. She knew too much of life to consider it anything but a small sum, but she was glad of it. She was sure that George’s father would never go on paying him an allowance. They would have to live on what he made by painting. She thought, then, with a swift, enchanted thrill, how little he knew of her, and what joy

it would be for her to reveal to him her competence—acquired in Belgium—where cooking and housekeeping were concerned. She would know very well how to make him comfortable.

“Oh,” she cried aloud, “I believe I can make him happy !”

She looked impatiently at her watch. Half-past ten. How slowly time passed ; the hands of her watch appeared scarcely to move. And yet, the day before, at Camelos, the stable-clock had seemed to boom every five minutes.

She wondered where they would go that night. Back to London, she supposed ; perhaps to his studio. She would prefer that to a hotel ; it was there that he had first kissed her. She little knew, as she sat restlessly smoking, that he, who had arrived too early, was waiting for her patiently in the village street. He smoked, too, and looked at his watch. Like her, he cursed the sluggishness of time. Fortunately for him, the night was cold and raw ; no one was astir in the village, to spy upon his vigil.

The lights behind the cottage-windows glowed with a marigold brightness, and the thought of home, that had been to him always so much of a prison, now seemed something sweet and desirable, if home meant Martina. He would never be afraid of being shut up with her. He would be content with that fate. With her, he knew he could find peace and sanity. He had been half-mad, during the four years of his marriage. As he reflected, staring out of the window, his ear caught the sound of a light footstep. The luminous hands of his watch stood at five minutes to eleven ; as he glanced at the time, he saw the reflection of her face in the windscreen. She looked pale, in the darkness of the night.

“Martina !”

He opened the door, sprang out, and took her in his arms. He felt a quick, warm joy like a wave breaking over his whole being ; this joy consoled him for his misery at the suffering he had wilfully inflicted upon Isabel and upon Herries. The memory of that was obliterated, momentarily, at least, in the rapture of her presence.

She whispered, at last :

"Let's get in the car, shall we? I don't want them to know—yet—that we've gone off together."

"If you like," he agreed, tucking the rug about her, "but they'll have to know soon, won't they?"

She smiled, and put her hand in his.

"It's fun," she said, "disappearing together to-night. As though we were in a secret world of our own."

"We always have been," he answered somewhat grimly to that. "Were you frightened, when you were waiting? Did you think I mightn't turn up?"

"I was a little frightened," she admitted candidly.

He described, briefly, his interview with Herries. Her hand tightened upon his. Although his voice was calm, she knew, because there was little about him she did not know, how deeply he suffered. He might well appear selfish, in his single-hearted persistence where she was concerned; she alone knew the extraordinary force that had driven him to her. And even she could not sometimes comprehend the frenzy of his feelings. It would seem that he clung to her, not only because of his love, which was great, but almost as though, without her, he feared to lose his mind. There was superstition as well as passion in his wooing.

"It was worth it," he said at length, starting the car, and driving slowly down the street. Then: "You won't mind being a poor artist's wife, will you?"

"Did you think I'd mind? But, George, Isabel won't divorce you. She'll never do that."

Suddenly the somewhat primitive hatred she had hitherto felt for Isabel vanished, for ever, like snow in sunshine, and her eyes filled with tears. The tears were shed for Isabel, who would scarcely have appreciated them.

"Why should she?" Martina continued. "I wouldn't, in her place. She'll keep thinking you'll come back."

"She'll have to give in after a time. But I hate—oh, never mind!"

"I know what you were going to say. But if I don't mind,

you mustn't, either. You see, I want us to be lovers. Where are we going?"

He slowed down.

"Anywhere in the world you want!"

"But now—to-night? Where are we going?"

He answered, after a pause, as she had hoped:

"Would you like to stay the night at the studio?"

"I'd like that best."

"But there's something," he told her, "I'd like to do first, if you wouldn't mind? Something I'd like you to do, too. . . ."

"What is it, George?"

"Will you come to Camelos, just for a few minutes? To the temple I told you about?"

"Of course! Whatever you like!"

He turned the car towards the park gates.

This was his farewell to a house he had learned to love. He did not tell her so; he did not want to sadden her. But there was something else, and this he decided to tell her.

He said, when they passed inside the park:

"There's a legend, you know, about the temple."

"What is it?" she asked again.

He told her, suddenly speaking with an almost feverish intensity:

"It's very old, as I said. It's always been there. Some people say it existed before the original house was built, but I should think that's rot. Anyhow, believe it or not, long ago, in George II's reign, there was a witch, in the village here. They drowned her, of course. But they found some old book of spells belonging to her, and whoever owned Camelos in those days—I don't know the name—took it away, and put it in his library. There it remained, for many years, until in Victorian times, the squire of those days found it. He was something of a Puritan, and he buried it—solemnly—beneath the temple, because the temple, according to him, was pagan, too. He must have been a sinister old devil."

He stopped the car on the gravel sweep outside the house, that was dark now, and deserted. In the days he spoke of the

lighted windows must have glowed upon the avenue like a necklace of jewels. She had listened to his story indulgently, amused by the fairy tale.

"It's like the peasants' stories in Italy," she said, "but I don't see what it's got to do with us."

"I hadn't finished," he retorted, laughing excitedly. "There's something else. Something that *does* concern us . . . it appears that this book of spells contained a charm for true lovers—come on, Martina; I've got an electric torch; look—a spell for lovers, that is, who have faith!"

He had switched on his torch, and she followed him, blinking a little in the circle of orange light.

"Faith?"

"Look out—take my hand! Yes—faith in magic, in old, forgotten enchantments! Do you think you could ever have that sort of faith?"

His face, she noticed, in the torchlight, was white and strained. There were dark marks, like hollows, beneath his vivid eyes. He looked to her near breaking-point, and once again she was troubled by what seemed to her a flash of insanity. Knowing what he had so recently endured, she decided that he would recover directly he had sleep and rest. But he was too highly strung to be normal. For the moment she was ready to humour him.

"Faith?" she said. "Yes, I've got that, certainly about us. I'll do what you want."

"I knew you would."

They were walking close beside the lake.

"I want," he said, "to wish for us, in the temple. Just for luck."

He laughed again, and pressed her hand.

Now they were climbing a narrow, hilly path, overhung by cedar trees. Above their heads a pigeon fled, disturbed, clattering its wings. The night was dark, and deeply clouded. There were no stars. Nor was there any noise, after the pigeon had beaten its way through thickly-growing branches. Suddenly the stable-clock boomed the half-hour.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "that clock! How frightening it is when you're not expecting it!"

"We're in good time," he told her emphatically.

"What do you mean?"

He laughed again.

"After twelve, the spell won't work. Spells won't, then. They like to sleep."

"You know," she declared, "you're making me believe in this! Our wish is going to come true. I feel it in my bones."

They walked on slowly. An owl screeched not far away from them, and she gave a start of excitement as, from the woods half a mile below, she heard a sharp, distant barking.

"Someone's dog is loose."

He shook his head.

"No. That's not a dog."

"What is it?"

"Fox."

They continued to climb upwards.

"Look," he said, suddenly, flashing his torch.

She beheld a glimmer of white.

It was difficult, even with a light, to examine very closely the graceful Folly, with its domed top, its white, gleaming pillars. She followed him inside. The floor was boarded. There was a round table, and there were some garden chairs. She sniffed at a damp, decaying smell. She moved gingerly, like a cat, her eyes fixed on the torch.

For the first time, then, what she had treated as a joke began to perplex her. The atmosphere inside the temple did nothing to reassure her. Why should it? Her maternal ancestors had firmly believed in the evil eye.

"George," she began, doubtfully.

"What?"

"We won't stay here very long, will we?"

"Only long enough for our charm to work. Why?"

"We've got a long way to go."

"A long way," he agreed, "but it's not twelve, yet."

"It must be nearly twelve. It took us some time to get up here."

He put his torch down on the table, so that it blazed upon their two faces.

"In that case," he said, smiling, "I'll wish, for both of us."

She knew then, definitely, that she was not only perplexed, but afraid. She was frightened of the temple, of the woods, of the night, and of George. Yes, she was a little frightened of her lover, and that, to her, was strange. But she could not help her fear. He was so serious, so rapt, and somehow so remote. She shivered.

"Oh! stop!" she cried, "come away! Please come away!"

But as she spoke, the great clock began to strike across the lake, and he paid no attention to her.

"Twelve!" he exclaimed, gleefully, "just in time . . . listen, Martina——" and he raised his voice, "—listen, while there's time. . . . I wish for us to be free to love one another. Do you hear? To love one another . . . wherever we may be!"

Just as he finished, and as the slow clock was still striking, his torch fell off the table and was extinguished, as it crashed upon the ground, so that they were left alone in darkness.

Her control snapped, then, and she became purely Sicilian. Suddenly she was gibbering with terror.

She screamed:

"Put on the light! Put on the light!"

But no one answered, and she ran round the Folly like a frightened animal, stumbling over chairs and table. Then, as the clock struck its last solemn note, she heard another sound increase in loudness. The tremendous rattle of a coach, the clatter of horses' hooves, the jingle of harness.

In this darkness the coach would surely destroy her, and she screamed again.

"George! George!"

But he did not answer. The pounding of hooves, the mighty rumble of the coach came nearer, nearer, so that she could escape no longer.

Darkness engulfed her.

PART FOUR • 1812

CHAPTER XXVII

IN A DAZE she heard people talking.

A woman asked, in a sharp, decisive voice :

“ I have yet to hear what her ladyship was doing unattended on the road ? ”

Another woman answered in soft Oxfordshire :

“ My lady, her la'ship never said anything about going outside the grounds. She told Mrs. Betty she was going to take the air—that's all she said ! ”

How hot this room was, and it smelled of wax ! She had no wish to open her eyes.

The first woman spoke again.

“ And Mrs. Betty with the vapours, too ! What a household ! She's not ailing, her ladyship—there's colour in her cheeks ! ” Then, more sharply still : “ Harriet ! Harriet ! Will you please to open your eyes, when I address you ? ”

Martina knew, since her eyes were shut, that she must, confusingly enough, be Harriet. Obediently, she opened her eyes, whereupon she nearly fainted again.

A woman stood looking down at her. A tall, commanding, middle-aged woman wearing a turban of silver gauze, adorned with a cloud of green plumage. The woman, who held a *vinai-grette*, wore a curious, high-waisted dress of emerald green shot with blue.

And the room . . . she saw curtains of candy-pink, edged with silver. And a dressing-table lit with two sconces of candles, planted on each side of an oval, silver-framed mirror.

Never before had she seen this room. Then she perceived another woman bending over her. A stout woman, this, in a frilled mob-cap, with a red, honest face. This woman also wore a high-waisted dress.

"Will you please open the window?" Martina asked.

But the woman with the turban intervened. She was as gorgeous as a peacock.

"Open the window, indeed! Certainly not! Do you want the night-air to give you a fever?"

Martina sat up. By this time she felt stronger. She found that she had been lying upon a couch at the foot of a bed adorned with pink curtains and silver draperies.

She said, after a pause, to the peacock lady:

"I'm sorry—I *must* have the window open. It's the only thing to make me feel better!"

The woman in the cap, who was evidently a servant, said hastily:

"If your la'ship pleases—her la'ship's used to the night air!"

A window was opened, and Martina revived enough to look down and discover that she was wearing a muslin dress sprigged with lilac. A strange dress. She had never seen it before. And slippers of lilac kid—the peacock woman interrupted these discoveries with impatience.

"Harriet! you have exactly half an hour in which to make yourself presentable for dinner!"

"Dinner?"

"It's half-past five! Listen—the clock is striking now!"

And in mingled terror and perplexity, Martina heard one single booming note sound from the stable-clock. Camelos! She was still at Camelos!

The peacock lady said to the maid:

"Her dimity with the gold stars! And some gold dust in her hair, Emily! She's quite recovered—make haste!"

Then to Martina's relief, she swept from the room.

Martina turned to the friendly Emily and demanded:

"Please! Where's George? He was in the temple, too. Where is he?"

"For shame, your la'ship! Do you want me to lose my place?"

"Where is he? Please tell me!"

"Where should he be but in the schoolroom with the young gentlemen? Oh, your la'ship's a wicked girl! Pretending to have been run down by the coach when all the time you were with *him* up in the temple! Get up, when I tell you, and take off that dress!"

Martina obeyed, like a marionette.

"This is Camelos, isn't it?"

"Now don't you dare pretend to Emily that you're moon-struck!"

"But I am! I can't remember——"

"There's no mark on your body! You swooned when that young varmint had done making love to you—that's the beginning and end of the matter! Why, you came running up the garden like a lost soul! No wonder Mrs. Betty swooned, too, at the sight of your white face!"

"Where's George?" Martina persisted.

"I should think your la'ship would be ashamed to keep on about him! With Sir John dining to-night, and his lordship ready to consent! Stand still, do!"

"Sir John?" Martina asked in utter bewilderment.

"And don't play-act with me, because I've known you too long! If you stand out any more against this engagement, I don't know what your mama will have to say—she wasn't too pleased with you just now! As for his lordship——"

"Yes," Martina interrupted, satisfied at being at last understood, "that's who I want—I want his lordship. Please!"

"His lordship will no more countenance that tutor than your mama. And he's been a good brother to your la'ship——"

"I mean Lord Barradale!"

"I don't know what you're talking about. If I didn't know you so well, I'd believe your tales about being run down

by the coach ! Barradale, indeed ! That's a new name, and not the tutor's ! ”

“ I don't know any tutor ! ” Martina protested irritably, more confused than ever, “ I mean George. I want him. ”

“ You mean Mr. George Taylor, the tutor ! And it's no use your behaving worse even than Lady Caro, because there's been trouble enough for one night, and you're meeting Sir John at dinner ! Now, will you stand still ! ”

“ Lady Caro—Lamb ? ” a flash of comprehension came to her.

“ Who else ? Now will you—— ”

“ Oh, no, listen—Emily. Wait a moment ! ”

She ran across to the window, opening it wider. It was night, outside, but she knew, now, that she was at Camelos. Something terrible had happened. She had been left in the darkness of that evil place, the temple, and somehow, out of George's spell, the past had swallowed her. She turned, trying to laugh.

“ Emily, I bet you don't even know what year you're living in ! ”

“ I'm in no mood for pranks ! Your hair—— ”

“ Anything you like—*if you'll tell me !* What year do *you* think we're living in ? I don't believe you know. Just tell me, Emily ! Then I'll be as good as gold ! ”

“ Eighteen-twelve, and come along, do ! ”

Martina went, soberly.

There was nothing else to do.

She sat before the mirror, which reflected her own familiar face.

There was only one thought in her bemused mind. Where was George ? Had he, too, been cast with her into the past ? Was this some bad dream, some spell they would soon laugh at together ? Was he the tutor, or had she, through some witchcraft, lost him for ever ?

“ Where's my petticoat ? ” she demanded, suddenly.

Emily burst out laughing.

"A petticoat! Your la'ship'll be the death of me!"

"But . . . it's transparent!"

"You're not crippled, even if you did pretend the coach ran you down!"

"I see."

She got up, slowly.

"Emily, you are so clever, to-night. Can you, just as a treat, recite my name for me! It's not much to ask, and I did hurry, and I've not had a bath!"

"Get along downstairs with you!"

"No, please just say my name, first! It's—it's a kind of play I have—to bring me luck!"

Emily laughed, then, good-naturedly:

"Well, then, Lady Harriet Augusta Henrietta Fane—now will you get along to your dinner! And Sir John will bring you luck all right, if you treat him fair! No more Mr. George, though!"

"Thank you, Emily." . . .

Very serious, now, Martina went out of the bedroom on to a landing. A delicate spiral staircase uncoiled itself before her. Slowly, she went downstairs.

She found herself in a hall which was familiar. Yet, if this was Camelos, it was another house, of another age. She walked as though in a dream. Two men, in scarlet livery, their hair stiff with powder, waited in the hall. One of them, obsequiously, opened the door.

She walked, still mechanically, into a strange drawing-room, brilliant with tapestry. The room was hot, with the flames of what seemed a hundred wax candles. Three people sat in this room.

The peacock lady—supposed to be her mother—was one. There were two men sprawled on arm-chairs. One, who wore an emerald coat, and flesh-coloured pantaloons, was a dark, sullen young man, with green eyes like her own.

"Better, Harriet?" he asked, scarcely troubling to rise.

"Yes, thank you."

His companion sprang up to kiss her hand.

He was a well-developed man of about thirty-five. He had a plain, wholesome, honest face. He appeared to be in mourning, for his black was unrelieved, save for the lawn cravat about his somewhat thick neck.

"Lady Harriet! Are you quite recovered?"

"She is quite recovered," the lady declared dryly, from her sofa.

Martina, who felt exactly as though she were playing, unrehearsed, a rôle upon the stage, was nevertheless quick to resent the tone in which this remark was uttered.

"No, I'm not quite recovered," she retorted, truly, "I still feel as though I were in a dream."

"Oh, spare us further vapours," yawned the young man in green. She knew, then, that this must be 'his lordship,' her brother. No one but a brother could have been so rude. Therefore the florid man, Sir John, must be her suitor. She felt hysterically inclined to giggle.

"Dinner is served," announced one of the powdered servants.

"Your arm, madam?" suggested Sir John, advancing towards the elderly female.

"Come, Harriet," said the young man, in a bored tone, offering his arm to Martina.

They filed gravely across the hall.

"Little fool," suddenly drawled the man in green.

"Why do you call me a fool?" Martina not unnaturally inquired.

"Well . . . take it, or leave it, but do one or the other! Personally, I'd take it. It has money enough for both of us, dear sister. . . ."

They walked into a dining-room panelled in primrose. She could still scarcely believe herself in Camelos. She had never seen this room before. The room, however, was built on the site of the Silver Drawing Room.

When they sat down to dinner, she realized this, vaguely. The Silver Drawing Room would not be built for many years.

George had kissed her, in the Silver Drawing Room. But it was no longer there, and nor was he.

Only she was there, with these strange people, in this strange setting, victim of the most fantastic experience since time began.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DINNER ITSELF was one of huge proportions.

It seemed interminable, to Martina. She had never seen people eat so much as her companions. She knew, then, that they were not ghosts. The men ate gluttonously, frequently using their fingers. The old dame was nicer in her habits, but she gnawed her chicken-bones with the best of them. The men drank quantities of wine.

Martina was silent, trying to keep her wits about her. Sir John addressed her 'mother' as Lady Rainsborough. The dark young man was, of course, her son, Rainsborough.

"And I'm Lady Harriet Fane," thought Martina, refusing a vast helping of meat, "I mustn't forget it. . . ."

"You're eating nothing!" snapped Lady Rainsborough across the table.

"I'm not——"

"Oh, let her be, ma'am!" young Rainsborough suggested. He was jovial, now that he was drinking.

"Your cheeks are still pale," Sir John murmured, leaning towards her.

"I'm better."

"Yet," he continued, still speaking in a low voice, so that the others should not hear him, "it seems to me you're unlike yourself, to-night. You appear quiet, and sad, for you. Don't be sad, Harriet!"

"She misses the gaieties of London!" Rainsborough observed, not without malice, overhearing this remark.

"Be silent, William!" his mother commanded. "Come, Harriet—we'll leave the gentlemen!"

Martina followed her obediently, to the tapestry drawing-room. On the way she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and paused for a moment, enchanted by her own vivid reflection. The gold dust glittered in her hair. And her dress, with its gold stars sprinkled upon a gauze finer than gossamer—

"I'm waiting, Harriet, to be served with tea!"

"Tea?"

"You heard me, I think."

Martina served the tea in silence.

As she did so, a disquieting thought came to her mind. She had supposed, ever since her fainting-fit, that she had been cast into some spell, some enchanted dream, for a few hours. She had expected, during dinner, to wake up and find herself in the temple above the lake. But this dream, or spell, was oddly solid, and there was as yet no sign of an awakening. The room, with its parrot-bright tapestries, its swarms of overpowering candles, was real enough. So was Lady Rainsborough.

Martina looked furtively at the clear-cut, painted face, handsome despite the wrinkles with which it was etched, the thin, well-shaped lips, the brilliant grey eyes. Lady Rainsborough was more vivid than that other woman, that aunt of hers—but she could not, for the moment, remember the name of that aunt who had so recently scolded her.

Lady Rainsborough was speaking.

"I propose, for your own sake, to ignore any fairy stories about being run down to-night by a coach. They are patent falsehoods."

Martina said nothing.

"I do not propose even to ask you where you were this evening, or what caused you to swoon. We have more important matters to discuss. . . . Good God, girl, where's your tongue? Why do you stand gaping at me?"

"I beg your pardon—ma'am!"

"Still play-acting the country girl? Or sulking, I suppose, because you're here at Camelos!"

"I'm not sulking about that, or anything. I don't feel well—that's really true. But——"

"Sir John Russell," Lady Rainsborough announced, as though to a fanfare of trumpets, "has asked for your hand. You cannot keep him waiting any longer. As your mother, I desire to know your reply to his proposal!"

'I shall soon be awake,' Martina thought.

Aloud, she said:

"Please don't ask me to answer him to-night."

"And why not to-night, pray? What's wrong with to-night?"

'If you were real,' Martina reflected to herself, 'I might hate you as much as Aunt—What's-Her-Name. But you're not real. You're only part of a dream. So it doesn't matter.'

Aloud, she said:

"I swear to you I'm ill. I've got a bad headache, and I'm very tired. I'll not give Sir John an answer to-night, because, if I had to answer him, I'd say No!"

The other woman got up with a swift, angry movement, almost knocking over her tea-cup.

"Harriet, I insist upon your attention! You know, as well as I do, how Pen Lamb wanted to marry you when you were a child! Unfortunately, he died when you were still in the schoolroom, and that's the most brilliant offer you're ever likely to have, now that we're saddled with your brother's debts!"

One of the servants came in, then, and she was forced to be silent. But she resented the intrusion; her nostrils became pinched, and the moment that he departed she resumed:

"Owing to your vulgar indiscretion the other day in London, I was forced to remove you here to Camelos! People soon forget, thank God! And even you would scarcely dare flirt with a tutor in my presence! The next time, of course, I'll send the fellow packing!"

Something stirred, then, in Martina's bewildered mind. This woman was speaking the truth. Somewhere, somehow, she had heard these words before. Yet, although she now

wanted to wake up, she was unable to resist the fascination of what was happening to her.

1812 ! She was living three years before Waterloo ! Across the Channel the Emperor Napoleon bared his teeth. In England George III's son was Regent. Byron collected hearts, in London. Lady Bessborough wrote enchanting letters to Granville Leveson-Gower. There was music, at Devonshire House, although Lady Melbourne now reigned absolute in Whitehall. Martina's passion for this gracious epoch had, since her childhood, been insatiable. Now, for a split, ephemeral moment, she was part of it.

"Are you listening, Harriet ?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am—I'm listening !"

"I'm well aware," Lady Rainsborough continued, "that Sir John's scarcely what your poor father would have wished, as a husband for you. He, too, was set on Pen. But it's no use repining. You made a scandal with this lackey of a tutor, and Sir John's mad for you. He's wealthy, and a gentleman. You'll live in a genteel manor house not five miles from here, he'll give you a London season every year, and he'll help William with his debts ! Come, child—what's the objection ?"

The last words were so kindly spoken that Martina's heart was touched.

She said, coaxing :

"Have I your permission to leave the matter for to-night ?"

"You want to keep him jumping yet again ?"

"I'd only refuse him, to-night ! Perhaps I won't refuse him always. I'd like most to go to bed, if—if you wouldn't mind ?"

"And the spinet ? Do you mean to leave without music ?"

This, to Martina, was a terrible moment.

She pleaded, with as much charm as she could muster :

"My eyes are so bad to-night with my headache I couldn't even see the keys. You won't regret it, if you let me go to bed !"

"Then have it your own way ! You've always been a plague to me—you, and William, too. Thank God the other children

are still in the schoolroom! Be off with you, and no vapours to-morrow—they become most tedious!”

“Good night, ma’am,” Martina said, respectfully, but she was sharply recalled.

“Your curtsy, miss! I detest these modern, modish, careless ways!”

Martina curtsied hastily.

Outside, in the hall, she hesitated. For the first time since her adventure she was alone. She was certain, then, that she could find her way to the temple, and to George. She supposed him still to be waiting for her, unless he had really been transformed into the unknown tutor. But she continued to hesitate. She longed so much to sleep one night in Regency England, but no doubt she would wake as herself, as Martina Forest. Perhaps she would wake in that awful house belonging to the aunt whose name she had already forgotten. Perhaps she had dreamed the episode of the temple, and George had never even come to fetch her.

As she paused, uncertain, listening to the boisterous laughter of the men in the dining-room, she saw a faint light wavering beneath a door at the far end of the corridor. This room, and this corridor, were as unfamiliar as everything else in Regency Camelos. But she obeyed a strong impulse, and went softly to open the door.

She found herself in a dark library. This room was lit only by one candle, a candle held by George, who stood quietly as though waiting for her.

She ran forward and threw her arms about his neck.

How beautiful he looked, in the dress of the period! His face was white against the deep blue of his coat. His waterfall cravat was beautifully tied.

He laughed, excitedly, as he returned her kiss.

“I knew you’d come!”

She looked about her.

They were in a dark, oak-panelled library, that smelled of damp. Martina could not remember ever having seen this room before, and yet it seemed extraordinarily familiar.

George smiled, triumphantly, shielding the candle-flame with his hand.

"What do you think of my spell? I wasn't lying, was I? Magic can happen, even in 1937! And you look entrancing!"



CHAPTER XXIX

SHE WAS SO glad to see him that for a moment she forgot they were not at a fancy-dress ball.

"Who are you, George? Do you know who you are?"

He laughed, and took both her hands.

"Darling, I 'came to' in a room upstairs—a room that was many years ago turned into a linen-cupboard! Now, if you please, it's a schoolroom, but it's part of the old house . . . well, I looked down at my legs, and when I beheld skin-tight pantaloons, I thought something rum had happened! The next moment two brats, dressed in Kate Greenaway suits, came shaking my arm, to know if they must finish their Latin before supper! I knew, then, that I must have been turned into a Regency tutor of some sort. . . ."

"What did you do then?"

He laughed again, as though well pleased.

"I flatter myself I showed the greatest cunning. . . . I told them not to worry about the Latin, because we were going to study general knowledge. . . . I told them to imagine I had a sunstroke, and they were to try to bring me back to reason by telling me every known fact about their family. Well, they did, and I'm not one of the family myself! *You* are, though. But I'm a parson's son from Devon. My name's Taylor, at your service! Now, let's hear your story!"

She told him briefly.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, amused, "we've changed places, since we were in the temple, haven't we?"

"Don't speak too loud!" she entreated.

"Why not? What's wrong?"

"Supposing Lady Rainsborough heard us in here? I'm supposed to be in bed!"

"After all, this happens to be my home, although I must confess I don't recognize this particular room! Lady Rainsborough, whom I'd love to meet, has been in her grave for more than a hundred years! Who could be afraid of her?"

"All the same, don't talk too loud!"

"But why?" He was puzzled. "What's wrong? Aren't you enjoying our experiment?"

"Enjoying it? Of course, I'm enjoying it! But—let's face it, George—it isn't just a dream! We're really here, you know; I thought it was a dream, at first, but people don't dream so clearly . . . this is something stronger than any dream—it's true!"

"Oh, true for the moment!" he answered lightly, "true until we choose to go back to the temple. But, of course, I know where we are, and how real it is! We're in Regency England! They'll think us mad, darling, when we go back to tell them what's happened! Who'd believe us—I ask you? I shall go to London as soon as possible."

"London?"

"Of course! I shall see London unspoiled, as it was a hundred years ago! Johnson's dead, but Byron's alive, and Romney's painting, and Emma Hamilton's still young, and Borrow's a lad in Norfolk, and I can buy a Gainsborough for fifty pounds!"

As he spoke, she looked around her at the damp, dark-panelled room. Again something stirred in her mind.

She had been there before, with George. She had tried to convince him of something, long ago, and they had lit a fire together. Long, long ago. Before Venice. Before . . .

"Harriet," he interrupted, "there's nothing we can't do! We can see things no mortal man——"

"Why do you call me Harriet?"

He looked vague.

"Harriet? Did I call you that?"

"Yes! George, look round this room—do you really mean we've never been in here together before?"

He held the candle at arm's-length, and studied his surroundings attentively.

"I think . . ." he said at length, and hesitated: "I'm not quite sure. . . . I think—Look—what is all this? Are we in a dream within a dream? What are you hinting?"

"Oh! don't shout!" she begged nervously, and cupped her hands before the candle-flame.

He took no notice. He was still glancing about him now, but apprehensively, and without pleasure.

"I think," he said at length, "I've been here with you before. You were fooling about with some book of old wives' tales. You said——"

"It was you! You said there would be some hope for you, if you were born after Boney's time! I remember your very words!"

"And yours?" he retorted. "We wished then; we wished to live in the future! We said we'd cross time, or rather, you did. I didn't believe you, I remember. I said . . . I can't remember what I said. . . ."

She went across to the window, then, and peeped through the curtains. But everything was dark outside.

"We *did* cross time, George. We caught a glimpse of the future. That's what happened."

He stared at her, angry, incredulous.

"This business has turned your head, my girl! Are you trying to make out that this—all this—is real?"

"I think," she stammered, "that the future—what happened to-day—your car—Isabel—Venice—all that—was the dream. Surely *this* is true?"

He gave a short, mirthless laugh.

"I see! My name's not Barradale, then? I'm a tutor, called Taylor! Thanks so much! Come on—we're going back to that damned temple before midnight strikes!"

Martina shook her head. She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Perhaps you're right, but there's no hurry! I'm not going to the temple!"

"Not going!"

"No! Do you think I'm going to give up an adventure like this just because you're a tutor instead of being Lord Barradale! Of all the selfish things to ask! What difference can a few hours, or even a few days, make? Just now you were wanting to see old London—well, you'll have plenty of time, if you're going to wait for me! I wouldn't miss this chance for anything!"

He protested.

"But you just said——"

"I said I thought we belong to this time, and not to the future. But I don't *know*, any more than you know! How can I understand what's happening to us?"

"We could always come back here," he muttered. Already, so to speak, one foot was in the temple.

But she was not listening, for another thought struck her.

"George!"

"What is it?"

"When we made that wish, here in this room, and sent ourselves into the future, our wish came true—we met, as we'd prayed to meet!"

"We met in Venice!"

"But we didn't know each other! We were strangers, when we met after all those promises!"

"Those promises were dreams, just as this meeting's a dream, no matter what you say! We're not living, now—we're ghosts, talking; we've been dead a hundred years and more. We're dust, now; dust and dry bones; I suppose, in our modern life, we're a reincarnation of what we have been in these times!"

"If that's true, it makes it worse. We were so much in love, and when we met we didn't even know each other!"

"Don't cry," he said, more gently, "we're together now, in the past, and to-morrow, in the future. Nobody can part us. Nobody! And if you want to stay—here—for a few days, then we'll stay, that's all!"

But tears continued to rain down her cheeks, and she repeated, as though the thought were unendurable:

"We didn't even know each other!"

He put his arms round her.

"Don't cry!" he said again, "there's nothing to worry about! It might have happened to anyone!"

"Do you think this has ever happened to anyone else?"

"If it hasn't," he said, "we should be grateful, Har—Martina. So dry your eyes, and we'll enjoy a few days of Regency England! By the way, the sanitary arrangements are almost non-existent!"

She smiled, wiping her eyes.

"If only we could be together!"

"We can! Tell these old shades of yours to go to hell!"

"It's not so easy," she declared, shaking her head. "I must go now; I don't want you turned out of the house!"

"You mustn't worry," he told her. "I shouldn't go far. Only to the temple."

"You'll never go there without me, George?"

"Must you ask such a question? What do you think they're doing at—at home? Are they missing us, or are our astral bodies replacing us? If so, I hope they're behaving themselves nicely!"

When she had gone, leaving behind her only a faint fragrance of perfume, he sat down, absent-mindedly feeling for his cigarette-case. He was extremely annoyed to realize that he could no longer smoke. His pockets, he discovered, contained a guinea-piece and some silver, jingling together in a net purse. He became thoughtful at the contemplation of such modest means; he wondered whether he had any more money concealed in his bedroom.

He jumped up impulsively, determined to find out for himself, and in the passage immediately encountered Lord Rainsborough, somewhat flushed, Sir John having just departed.

"Hullo, Taylor," Rainsborough said awkwardly.

George recognized him at once from the candid description of his younger brothers, and for a moment the two owners of Camelos looked at one another, uncertain.

"Good evening—my lord," George answered, with a slight, impertinent bow.

"Care for a glass of port?" Rainsborough suggested.

"I'd be enchanted."

He followed his host towards the Silver Drawing Room, only to discover himself in the primrose-panelled dining-room which had already, that evening, surprised Martina. It astounded George. He stood staring for so long that Rainsborough, leaning back in his chair, inquired:

"Are you feeling queasy? It's devilish hot in here, but her ladyship——"

He went over to the window and opened it slightly, so that the candle-flames quivered, as though trembling with cold.

"No, no," George reassured him, "it's only—it's the beauty of this room! Thank you!"

He drank his port gratefully—it was the best he had ever tasted.

He thought young Rainsborough looked at him oddly. At length his host remarked:

"You must have seen this room a hundred times before! Never been touched since the Restoration!"

"To think," George murmured, horror-struck, "to think that one day . . . vandals will destroy it!"

"Who's going to destroy it?" Rainsborough demanded, with truculence, slopping more port into both their glasses.

George was taken aback.

"I meant . . . after we're dead!"

The young man burst out laughing.

"Be damned to your long face, tutor! You ain't teaching Francis and Perry now! Come on—no heel-taps!"

"Willingly," said George, "may I congratulate your lordship on some excellent port?"

CHAPTER XXX

"YOU SEE," RAINSBOROUGH said confidentially, ten minutes later, "when they told me you were mooning about love-sick for Harriet, and my mama—her ladyship—wanted to send you packing, I'd have none of it! I refused, sir. I positively and utterly refused!"

George, astonished by this unexpected ally, and still tearful from an unlucky experiment with snuff, wiped his streaming eyes, and said nothing.

Rainsborough continued:

"I said: 'Ma'am, you should know your own daughter! Harriet's a romp and a flirt; always has been! As for this new tutor,' I said, 'keep him, ma'am, keep him!' I said, and it's true, Francis and Perry talk like gentlemen now, and read and write, and blow their noses, and keep their ferrets in the stables! 'Whose doing, ma'am?' said I. 'The tutor's! Keep him, ma'am, keep him!' And she has! I told her, too, that the London indiscretion was Harriet's fault, to anyone who knows her! I said she'd tire of you soon enough, as a brat tires of a doll, and——"

George interrupted.

"May I ask what indiscretion I am supposed to have committed in London with Lady Harriet?"

Rainsborough grinned.

"Oh, don't deny it, man! Too many witnesses! You met her at Vauxhall, the pair of you masked. You know as well as I do her Uncle Pomfret dragged her home kicking!"

"Good heavens!" George exclaimed, not without sarcasm. "I'm inclined to agree with you. My behaviour was not only indiscreet, but infernally clumsy! I see no excuse for myself!"

"There you are," Rainsborough exclaimed, well satisfied, "I always declared it Harriet's fault! Well, keep away from her, Taylor—she's a baggage, and not equal to the loss of a damned easy situation, eh?"

In a second, it was Barradale facing Rainsborough. The tutor had vanished.

"My lord," said Barradale haughtily, "don't think me impertinent if I tell you those are matters which concern you not at all! But I'll gladly take another glass of your most excellent port!"

"Upon my word," the young man declared, "my mother's right when she says your gall is high! You talk as though you were the Regent, courting!"

"God forbid!"

"A Jacobite?"

"Why, no. Nothing in particular. Your brothers' tutor, sir!"

Rainsborough poured out some more port. He fixed his light green eyes, a little glassy now, upon the tutor's pale and sculptured face.

"You're a rum fellow, Taylor! A scholar, too, and there you have the advantage! I was never that . . . but tell me, you who know so much . . . are we to be conquered by this fellow, Boney, or will we smash him to hell? Eh? What do you think?"

George looked at the ruby liquid in his glass. What sort of port was this? Old Herries would have drunk it on his knees! It was not port so much as nectar.

"Boney?" he said at length. "Oh, don't worry about him!"

"Worry?" The word seemed strange. "What do you mean—worry?"

"I mean," George said deliberately, putting down his glass, "I mean that you—and England—are disturbing yourselves without reason. This country will conquer Napoleon! In three years from now, to be exact. In Belgium! Don't forget, one day, I told you so."

Rainsborough stared heavily across the table.

"A prophet are you, as well as a tutor?"

"I'm a better prophet," George answered candidly.

"Think you can tell the future, I suppose?"

"I know," George returned, "that I can tell the future."

There was a pause, while they drank more port.

The young man, slumping in his chair, appeared to digest this statement for some moments, after which he inquired:

"Fortune-telling? All right, tutor—let's hear some mysteries! What's my future to be? And Harriet's—you'll hugely enjoy telling hers!"

"No," said George to this, "I can't tell you Lady Harriet's future. I don't know it. We'll leave Lady Harriet out of this conversation, if you please! But yours . . . your future . . . I suppose you were born to fight at Waterloo——"

"Where? What's that name?"

"The battle I talked of. It will take place three years from now. I presume you'll fight. But I can't tell you whether you'll live or die."

"A fine soothsayer!" Rainsborough jeered.

"Wait! I hadn't finished. I can tell you the future of this house. . . ."

"The house? What of it? You're drunk!"

"We're both drunk! All the same, I'll tell you the history of this house . . . when the Regent's dead, and William's gone, his niece Victoria will reign——"

"Who's she?"

"Heiress to the throne."

"And Princess Charlotte?"

"Will die. Deeply mourned, in child-bed!"

"You're an impudent fellow!"

"Wait! I hadn't finished! This house, Lord Rainsborough, will be pulled to pieces, when Victoria is queen. This wing, where we're sitting, will be altered so much that no one, a hundred years from now, would recognize it. Your Restoration panelling will go, and this will vanish! Here, a hundred years from now, if you were alive, you'd see, instead

of this, a silver drawing-room, and, believe me, you'd not know you were in the same house ! ”

“ Taylor ! ” his lordship announced benevolently, “ you're devilish foxed ! ”

“ Do you mean tight ? Well, I suppose I am a little,” George allowed, “ but I'm more or less sober, compared with you, my host ! Don't you agree ? ”

“ You're damned subversive,” Rainsborough declared, not without a sulky respect.

“ Because I see the future ? ”

“ A pack of old wives' tales ! You can't tell me if I'll marry an heiress ? ”

“ What Byron called a Golden Dolly ? No, I can't ; my fortune-telling stops short where you're concerned ! ”

Rainsborough gaped.

“ How d'you know what Lord Byron says ? ”

George hesitated.

“ Surely all England knows what Lord Byron says ? ”

“ You're a damned rum tutor ! ” Rainsborough exclaimed, “ but I suppose Harriet's shown you letters from Lady Caro ! God ! If only they wouldn't write ! Have some more port ? What else have you to say about the future ? ”

George smiled, his fingers curling round the stem of his glass.

“ In a hundred years from now, my lord, there will be no coaches, no curricles. . . . ”

Rainsborough burst out laughing.

“ We'll walk everywhere, according to you ? ”

“ We won't walk ! We'll have coaches run by machines. We'll travel more than fifty miles an hour. And don't forget the sky ! We'll have flying ships to take us from England to France in less than two hours' time ! ”

“ The dreams of a lunatic,” Rainsborough commented uncomfortably, and added : “ Never let her ladyship hear you speak of these matters ! She has a nose for smelling out witches ! God, man—she might even get you burned ! ”

“ Nowadays ? ”

"It's been done not so long ago."

"I don't talk to your brothers of these matters," George hastened to explain, not without apprehension.

"My brothers? They're like me, tutor—they reek of the stables, and know every fox's earth in the county! You'll never make scholars of them! It's only Harriet, in our family, who reads poetry. I suppose that's how you came together? Well, forget her, and forget these crazed dreams of machinery!"

"What do you propose I should do?"

"Harriet told me once you painted portraits?"

George reflected.

"Did she, now? But even in that case, you'd never give your consent to our marriage, would you?"

Rainsborough guffawed, stretching out his legs. For freedom, he had unbuttoned his pantaloons. He continued to drink.

"My dear fellow—Harriet's not for you—can't you understand plain English? She's as good as pledged to Russell, and God help 'em both! But it suits me—I'm in difficulties, you know—posted, and so forth. And a flighty piece like Harriet's lucky to get so solid a husband as Russell . . . a pretty dance she'll lead him, between the two of us. . . ."

"Could anything," George demanded, "make me, in your eyes, a proper suitor for Lady Harriet's hand?"

"No," Rainsborough answered bluntly, "I'll be damned if it could! Oh, don't glare at me—I like you well enough, Taylor—you've a pretty wit, and you're a gentleman, but . . . well, you're not for my sister! Russell's lucky to get her, according to Mama—he's no family to boast of, and it's a poor marriage for Harriet. God help 'em both, say I! Another glass of port?"

"Lady Harriet," George informed his host solemnly, "will not, I think, marry Sir John Russell."

"Fortune-telling again?"

"As a matter of fact, I wasn't."

"You'd better not plan an elopement," said Rainsborough, with an ugly look.

"That won't be necessary," George answered, laughing, and indeed the idea struck him as richly comical. He added, and was conscious of a slight dizziness as he spoke :

"Don't upset yourself ! One day, I swear I'll toast you here in Camelos, although I must confess my port's inferior to yours ! But all the same, I'll toast you—here—in my Silver Drawing Room, on the site of something gone for ever ! Then I'll drink, sir, to your bones !"

Rainsborough raised himself unsteadily, leaning heavily upon the table. His dark face was pale.

"Who the hell are you ?"

"Your brothers' tutor !"

Rainsborough sank slowly into his chair. He poured himself some more port, and his hand shook.

"No," he said thickly, "you're . . . you're . . . something damned—the fiend himself ! God knows ! But when you look as you did now, I swear my flesh crawls !"

"If it reassures you, I've not yet sold my soul to Satan !"

"If Harriet's soul belongs to you, again I say God help her—and Amen to that !"

"How do you tie that neck-cloth ?" George inquired with interest.

"My cravat ? You're a cold-blooded devil !"

"I'm afraid I'm only a social failure. . . . Well . . . you shouldn't ask tutors to drink with you, Lord Rainsborough ! How can you expect poor devils like us to please our betters ? You might as well call in a circus to divert you !"

Rainsborough brooded, with the darkness only a drunken man can achieve, staring with sombre eyes into the depths of his glass.

"What you said just now . . . about toasting me in my own house . . . damme, man, you talked as though I were dead. . . ."

His head slowly subsided upon his arms, and the glasses tinkled as he sprawled across the table.

"It's a wise man," George mused aloud, "who knows whether or not he's dead."

He drained his port, and stood up, swaying slightly, just as

Rainsborough crashed heavily upon the floor. For a moment George looked down upon the master of his own house. Rainsborough snored, stretched on his back. The famous cravat was tumbled now, and stained with wine that splashed its whiteness like spots of blood. The pantaloons were still unbuttoned, the pumps had long ago been kicked upon the floor.


"I don't even know where your room is," George reflected, but a snore was his only answer.

George knew, drunk as he was, that he wanted to be with Martina. Some vague remnants of prudence prevented him from searching for her in this ancient Camelos that was still so strange; he wandered out into the hall, where he found two candles burning low. Seizing one, he made his way, stumbling, to the tutor's modest room.

He was so confused that his own adventure seemed obscure, to him. He needed sleep. Tearing off his clothes, he rolled upon the narrow bed and slept until the familiar stable clock struck eight.

His head throbbed, and his mouth felt dry.

It consoled him slightly to think that Rainsborough must be feeling worse.



CHAPTER XXXI

MARTINA'S AWAKENING WAS more agreeable.

For some time she lay in her curtained bed, her eyes closed, trying to remember what had happened to her. For a moment she thought herself back in Cheyne Walk, in Isabel's house, and a discomfort quite apart from jealousy troubled her so much that she moved impatiently, as though in a nightmare. But she was awake; a sweet breeze stirred the curls on her forehead; a sunbeam danced, glinting upon her pillows, and from somewhere in the distance two blackbirds sang clearer than a fountain's jet.

As she lay at peace, blissfully at peace, basking in the sunlight, the fresh morning air fanning her cheek, the blackbirds' song in her ear, a voice, sounding close beside her, rudely shattered her tranquillity.

"Your la'ship's water will be cold, if you don't get up!"

She opened her eyes vaguely, and saw the maid, Emily, standing over her bed.

So the dream was not a dream. It was still true. She was Lady Harriet Fane, living in 1812; she was on the verge of being betrothed to Sir John Russell, and she was in love with her brothers' tutor, who was really Barradale.

She looked sleepily at Emily.

"I would like to stay in bed all day, so as to avoid trouble. . . ."

"Not still pretending the coach ran you down, you bad girl?"

"I don't know . . . must I get up, Emily?"

"I wish you would; I want the rooms done!"

* Martina stretched, yawning. When she sat up in bed,

everything she beheld seemed agreeable. Outside, fleecy clouds dappled a sky blue as a thrush's egg, but the sun burst forth from time to time in April fitfulness, and everything smelled of daffodils.

"Yes," Emily said, watching her, "they're the first this year. Little Sue, at the lodge, gathered them for you, and I brought them in just now when I drew the bed-curtains, but you wouldn't be bothered to stir yourself. . . ."

Martina smiled, touching the golden flowers beside her bed.

Seen by daylight, the pink room was even more charming, more luxurious, than it had seemed by candlelight. A fire crackled in the grate, and before the fire, on the hearthrug, was placed a shallow bath like a huge saucer.

"What's your la'ship smiling at?" Emily demanded, not without suspicion.

"I feel happy . . . yes, I'll get up, and have my bath."

Emily chattered, as the girl pulled her night-gown over her head.

"There's a new-laid egg for you, and the reddest apple you ever saw, and bread-and-butter fingers, and that French chocolate you're so partial to, and—have a care! You'll burn yourself, if you don't try that water first!"

Martina laughed. It was true that she was happy. She was charmed, that long-ago April morning, by so much that she had never, in her own haunted life, known before. The sunny, luxurious room with its leaping fire, the hot bath waiting for her upon the hearth-rug, the creamy-smelling daffodils glowing near her bed!

For a short time, as she bathed, she forgot to think of George. She was conscious of a comfort hitherto undreamed of. Emily, with her red, honest face, was there to take charge of so many things that she had hitherto been forced to do for herself.

"The riding-habit?" Emily questioned, holding out what she called a 'shift' of delicate lawn.

Martina considered.

Long ago, in that other life, her father, Captain Forest, had

acted as manager to a Cossack troupe performing in Paris. These Cossacks, who were incidentally swindled by him, taught her, during their spare time, how to ride. She recollected that they had been proud of their pupil. She decided to be brave.

"Yes," she said, "the riding-habit."

Emily buttoned her into a close-fitting, bottle-green garment, and placed, all ready to wear, a dashing hat with a curled green feather.

But Martina, fascinated, was studying the cosmetics on Harriet Fane's dressing-table. It seemed odd to her, then, that women of the twentieth century should consider themselves so sophisticated, for there was no cream, powder, salve, or unguent lacking upon that dressing-table of long ago. As she sat there, experimenting gleefully, Emily interrupted her.

"Mrs. Betty will be here in a moment. She's quite recovered. Are you ready for your boots?"

"Mrs. Betty?"

"It seems she's had a scolding from her la'ship for letting you stray on to roads you never strayed on! And don't you tell *her* you were up at the temple!"

Martina once again experienced the eerie sensation of something tantalizingly half recollected. She said, vaguely:

"My governess . . .?"

"Governess! More a mother to you than her la'ship! And to think of her staying here still when you're a great girl all ready to be married! Give me your other foot!"

"She likes . . . the tutor, doesn't she?" Martina hazarded, not without timidity.

"Hush, do! Only let your mama hear that, and you'll see Mrs. Betty packed away to London on the first coach!"

"I love all this," Martina sighed, as a knock sounded at the door.

In came Mrs. Betty, a plump but comely little woman of about fifty, still wearing, almost with defiance, the silvery powder of a finished epoch. It was impossible to dislike

Mrs. Betty; she was so fresh, with her crisp muslin and *fichu*, so charming with her pink, sweet-pea cheeks, her jelly-like double-chin, her tiny hands and feet, her lilac fragrance, and her swift, bird-like movements.

"Now, Harriet, will you please to hurry! Your breakfast's waiting in the Porcelain Room, and we want no more upsets to-day, you know! Yesterday, Heaven knows, was enough to kill me!"

"What horse am I to order?" Emily interrupted, masterfully tactful.

"Oh . . ."

"Black Prince, or Corsair, or the grey mare Sir John sent for you to try?"

"Black Prince," Martina answered firmly.

Emily vanished just as Mrs. Betty began:

"Harriet, my love, I can't endure many more of these lies! You've been so wicked, dear, and you've made me so ill, and your mama so indignant! Yesterday was a nightmare, and——"

Outside the open window sounded a peal of childish laughter. Martina ran across the room to thrust her head outside. There she saw the unchanged green lawns of Camelos. Two young boys raced across the grass. They were aged about thirteen and eleven. They were dark-haired, handsome children, wearing nankeen pantaloons and frilled shirts. A greyhound chased them, barking happily. Behind this happy group, his head slightly bowed, she perceived George, walking slowly, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Hullo!" she called joyfully.

The children stopped to stare, their faces dancing with mischief. The greyhound rolled upon the turf, and George looked up at her. He was deathly pale.

"Hullo!" she called again. Her own face, as she leaned out of the window, was sparkling with radiant vitality.

"Happy?" he called, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Oh, yes! Aren't you?"

"No! I have a headache."

Coldly he walked away behind the children, and was soon lost to sight behind a grove of cedar trees.

"Oh . . ." she murmured angrily, biting her lip. A crimson flush coloured her face.

"Harriet! How dare you!"

She turned to confront Mrs. Betty, who was quivering with indignation.

"How dare I what?"

"Shout so imprudently out of the window! Suppose your mama had heard you calling to Mr. George?"

"You *do* like him, don't you?" Martina asked trustingly.

"Have I not shown it? But these—these street-boy manners must stop, really they must! Calling, whistling, running away! You're a young lady—why can't you behave like one?"

"Why does he look so angry?" Martina persisted miserably.

"Now, Harriet!"

"But he does! He was angry, and he looked so white and sick! He wasn't pleased to see me!"

Mrs. Betty laughed indulgently.

"It seems he sat up drinking with William until dawn. You should be pleased that they agree!"

"They were drunk?"

Mrs. Betty laughed again. Her laugh was a silvery trill that reminded Martina of the blackbirds outside her window.

"Are gentlemen ever sober when they're together? Don't be a goose, my dear, and come along to breakfast! There's a nice little steak awaiting me, and your own ridiculous bird's peck awaiting you! Come alone, do—before your mama takes some other fantasy into her mind!"

"I love this," Martina declared again, as they left the room.

"Love what, dear?"

Martina considered, frowning.

"Being looked after, I suppose," Captain Forest's daughter at length produced, gratefully.

"Hurry, my love! You'll be late for your ride!"

CHAPTER XXXII

SHE HAD NOT lost her skill in riding. Rather, since she had seldom ridden side-saddle, she seemed to have gained an accomplishment. The groom, chaperoning her from behind, appeared to notice nothing strange about her horsemanship. Whenever, through ignorance, she strayed from the bridle-path, he called to her respectfully, with the affectionate familiarity of an old servant :

“Not that way, your la’ship, or we’ll have the farmer after us ! Wait till I open the gate !”

At first she was so intrigued by her admirably mannered black hunter that she had little enough time to spare for the country-side. But soon its beauty obtruded itself upon her senses. The green tapestry of a long-ago-forgotten gracious spring divinely unrolled itself before her eager eyes. Those trees were bare now, almost spectral, yet already some of them were faintly misted with a paleness that would, in a few short weeks, burst into a myriad rich and fertile buds. The country soon would be transformed ; those dark, ploughed fields, those skeleton branches would be woven with a fair and delicate green fresher even than the scent of young lilac. As she rode she, who had lived so much in modern cities, already sniffed the sweet breath of spring, and was content. She looked about her, pulling up her horse.

They were on a hill now, near the spinney of Fair Rosamund’s Bower ; rooks cawed from tall trees, already weaving their clumsy nests amongst boughs that were still bare. The sun was shy but persistent ; it gilded the billowing clouds from which, occasionally, it crept. The distance, seen from Rosamund’s Bower, was remote and lovely ; misty, still, its

blue was hyacinthine ; and somewhere, so far away as to appear more romantic than a fairy tale, three delicate steeples rose, like turrets from elf-land, amidst the sea-coloured haze of the distant landscape.

While she watched, enchanted, she heard the soft, muffled thunder of horses' hoofs. She turned, to perceive Sir John Russell cantering up the hill towards her. He rode a great bay horse with majestic shoulders, and her first impression, watching him, was that of looking at an old, animated, sporting print.

But when he approached he became more real, and once again she was forced to realize that she was not living in a dream. Sir John was healthily flushed with exertion. No one, watching him, could have supposed that he had drunk two bottles of port the night before. He still affected black—mourning as he was his mother—but his boots glittered and his buckskins were impeccable. He rode his horse easily, smiling as he joined her on the crest of the hill.

"Good morning to you, Lady Harriet !"

"How did you find me ?"

"Oh !" he laughed, fondling his horse's mane, "Lady Harriet's too beautiful to ride abroad without every peasant in the neighbourhood knowing what bridle-path she's taken ! Look at Pilot, will you, Harriet, and wonder with me why he's blowing ? Rot him ! I hoped to have that one last hunt on him before the month is out !"

She watched him in silence. The groom walked his horse away out of hearing.

"Harriet !" Sir John remarked softly, "you slipped away last night, but I woke this morning still thinking of you, and I've followed you now across six miles of country ! Will you marry me ?"

Martina reflected.

She had had in that modern life grown so remote, no time at all for flirting. She had fallen in love with Barradale when she was too youthful ever to amuse herself with other men. But now . . . she felt strangely carefree, and confident ; for the first time sure of her own attraction.

"Did I ask you to follow me?" she inquired, looking at him beneath her lashes.

"Now, Harriet——"

"What makes you think I'd marry you?"

"You as good as told me so!" Sir John burst forth indignantly, "and Lady Rainsborough's for it, and your brother, too!"

"That means nothing—less than nothing—to me!"

"But, Harriet," and he laid his hand upon her horse's bridle, looking at her gravely with clear hazel eyes, "but all this—this business of our betrothal—has been pending these two months or more! Can't we end it one way or another? I'll endure anything, you know, save suspense!"

She pouted. How easy it was to play the coquette!

"I don't want to marry anyone!" she declared, shaking her head.

"Then why, the other day, in that meadow by the church, did you——?"

"Oh, why, why, why! How do I know what I do from one day to another! Don't pester so, Sir John!"

"Lady Harriet," he declared earnestly, still looking at her, "I know well enough that your affections have been engaged elsewhere. I know how much you like someone who can never aspire to your hand! I know you were a madcap when you were a child in the nursery, before Lady Melbourne's son died. . . . I know, then, that growing as you did, in the cynical world of London, you, who are too honest to be worldly, formed an attachment with . . . this person . . . a gentleman . . . unsuited to your station! But do you suppose that makes any difference to my own feelings, where you are concerned?"

Martina turned her horse's head.

"Then, Sir John, if you know my feelings, why try to persist against them?"

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "because the glitter—the tarnish, I would call it—of London seems to have tainted you, to my mind! Lady Bessborough's your godmother, isn't she? Well——"

"I must be going home!"

"Do you really suppose that London fashionables make a world? Sweetheart, how can you think so? I know I'm no worldly suitor for you—I never knocked the Charlies down, and my father never went with Mohawks, and I hate to stake more than I can lose! But, Harriet, does that make me any worse a man? Do you know how much I love you? And I can give you happiness, too; Greystoke Manor's a home you would soon love, and, every summer, if you wished, we'd take a house in London!"

Martina sighed, because she pitied him.

If only she had never known the anguished joy of loving George, she supposed she could have been happy enough with Sir John. He was a good, solid man, and she could visualize his manor-house as clearly as though it were presented before her eyes.

She was sure that in summer stocks and tobacco-flowers perfumed his garden, and there was a pigeon-cote in his stables; spaniels basked in the sunny yard, and there were bowls of potpourri to scent his drawing-room. There was a grandfather clock upon his staircase, and he slept in the great bed where he had been conceived, and born, and in which his father had died. He was the unchanging Briton; hard-headed, resolute, unimaginative, brave, and obstinate. He would make, she realized, an excellent husband; his love for Harriet was steady and unwavering; sometimes, of course, he would get drunk, but this intemperance, combined with stubbornness, would be his only faults. His sons he would worship. His land he cared for passionately—it had been his since long before his ancestors fought at Agincourt. He was a good landlord. His own stud-groom was direct descendant of a serf who, centuries ago, had held his ancestor's stirrup on some battle-ground already grown more remote than any embroidered tapestry. He was the Squire; none the less proud because he was, in the eyes of the Rainsboroughs and other noble families, a small, almost a petty squire. The pride of blood was strong in him, and he was not without

dignity. He was, if but a little king, a sagacious ruler of his own domain.

All this Martina sensed, watching him out of the corner of her eye.

"I'd cosset you, you know!" he declared earnestly. "My wife, Harriet, would want for nothing!"

She said, in a spirit of devilment:

"I wonder if Lady Harriet Fane ever married Sir John Russell! What do you think?"

"There's no need, dear, to talk of us in the past tense. It's foolish, and—and wicked!"

"You're too solemn!" she cried, shaking her head, her face sparkling with mischief.

He smiled, a little ruefully.

"No one, ma'am, could say as much for you!"

"Come on!" she announced. "I'm going home!"

They walked their horses down the hill, followed by the groom.

"Am I, then, so tedious?" he inquired, after a pause.

"I didn't mean that you were tedious. You're not; I could like you very well as a friend, I think. If only you wouldn't pester me to marry you!"

At this flash of temper he recoiled. His cheeks reddened, then paled.

"You have a genius for cruelty!" he murmured in a low voice.

"I don't want to marry you! Can't you understand plain English?"

"I think," he assured her with a sigh, "I am beginning to understand a spoilt young lady."

"There you go again—worse than any schoolmaster!"

"Harriet," he told her suddenly, speaking in a clear, firm tone, "I want you to understand one thing. I'm not a boy to be trifled with; I'm a man whose happiness is in your power. All the same, I'm a man! I can't continue in this wise—I *can't* allow you to play with my future like some capricious kitten with a mouse—I'm damned if I can! No

I'll give you a month in which to get over what you think of as an attachment, and then, at the end of that time, if you still treat me in this manner, I'll never 'pester,' as you call it, again! No! I'll put you out of my life, if it breaks my heart to do so! That I swear to you!"

He had laid his hand upon her horse's bridle as he spoke; now he released the reins, not without dignity.

"You know nothing of my situation!" she informed him angrily.

"More than you believe, ma'am! Make no mistake!"

"Another sermon?"

"You could do with one!"

"Perhaps. But I prefer people who make me laugh!"

"Indeed? I suppose that worthless usher——"

Her eyes glittered.

"Do you want to be insulting?"

"Had I my way, I'd put him in the stocks!"

"Look," she said suddenly, as they continued to glare at one another. He turned his head. The groom, at the end of the field, was holding open the gate. They said no more, but rode in to Camelos park.

"I'll race you home!" Martina suggested, her anger evaporating.

"As you will. But wait——"

She did not wait.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AFTER A HUGE, solemn lunch Lady Rainsborough called Martina aside into the tapestry-room. The other two persons present, Lord Rainsborough and Mrs. Betty, were not bidden to the conference.

"I want to speak to you, child," Lady Rainsborough told her briskly.

Martina said nothing.

"I hear you met Sir John on your ride this morning?"

"Yes . . . we quarrelled."

Lady Rainsborough laughed, almost with indulgence.

"As lovers have quarrelled throughout the ages! No need to look so serious! No, I have something pleasant to tell you, for a change."

And she continued to regard, not without affection, the flushed, lovely, and somewhat mutinous face of her only daughter, Harriet. This child, and William, had always caused her anxiety, but at least William, until his first term at Oxford, had been controlled by a stern, intelligent father. Now he ran wild, and caused her many a heartache. But Harriet . . . Harriet had always been a tomboy. Always, in the nursery, this child had moved beneath the shadow of perpetual disgrace.

In the nursery, too, as a mischievous little girl with a torn apron, she had found favour with a young buck named Peniston Lamb.

"Lady Rainsborough," Peniston had declared, "I'll wait for Harriet's first season . . . that will suit us both, don't you agree, ma'am? She's the only girl with spirit I ever saw who pleased me . . . with your permission, I'll marry Harriet!"

Lady Rainsborough thought he jested. She reminded him

that Harriet still played with a doll—or, to be strictly truthful, Harriet ought still to have been playing with a doll, rather than with her brother's soldiers.

"No matter—I'll wait!" was the brusque reply of this young man.

But Pen, poor Pen died, and his younger brother married Harriet's playmate, Caroline Ponsonby, and Harriet would never now be Lady Melbourne.

Then Harriet grew up, only to revolt against her mother, to flirt with her brother's tutor. The scandal of Vauxhall had caused many London tongues to wag. Harriet's forcible removal by her Uncle Pomfret, kicking, screaming, biting, had caused an appalling scandal amongst her mother's friends. There were those who insisted that the tutor was her lover. Small chance, after that, of a fashionable marriage! Lady Rainsborough sighed. Many people, she knew, blamed her for retaining the tutor, but what was she to do? Never again could she find an educated young man to work for so small a salary! He only worked for her now on condition that he studied his painting while the boys were out riding. Someone, however, must control those wild, ignorant sons of hers, and William's debts made school impossible.

Lady Rainsborough sighed again. She missed her husband, although it must be confessed that during his lifetime she had seldom exhibited any demonstrations of affection for him, and it was said, indeed, that no lady of quality had had more lovers than Arabella Rainsborough.

But nobody knew for certain. She was so much a woman of her epoch; she belonged completely to the eighteenth century. Whatever she did she did with a careless, careful grace that artfully concealed rather more than it revealed. She had had the decency, she reflected, of discretion. She could not pretend to understand these shameless misses of the nineteenth century! Harriet, with her tutor, making a public scene at Vauxhall—unchaperoned, too! Caro Lamb—a bad influence, if ever there was one—parading that wicked poet, Lord Byron, before the fashionable world!

But Harriet had always perplexed her. Even the children's nurse, she recollected uncomfortably, had called Harriet a changeling. That word, to a lady of the eighteenth century, was still an ugly one. She thought that if Harriet ran away with the tutor, the shame of such an elopement would kill her. But the tutor now knew his place—she had made it clear enough to him! And Sir John Russell was happily persistent. At the thought of Sir John, Lady Rainsborough's face cleared. He was steady and respectable. As a husband for Harriet he lacked those dazzling qualities that had possibly expired with Peniston Lamb, but Harriet, after the Vauxhall scandal, was lucky to get so sound an offer. If he seemed a little dull, so much the better! Harriet was too flighty for her own good!

Martina waited patiently for the good news. Emily had insisted upon a change of clothes, after the ride, and she wore a dress of primrose dimity. She twisted her shoulder, the better to observe her reflection in the mirror. George would like her in this dress, with the yellow ribbon threading her hair. All the same, it was a pity that he had not seen her in her riding-habit—

"Harriet! Are you really incapable of paying attention?"

"No, ma'am! I was listening!"

"Then look at me when I'm addressing you!"

"I'm all attention!" Martina murmured.

Lady Rainsborough continued:

"Your Aunt Dorothea, of Chelsea, having a return of her fever, has decided not to use the house she took for a month at Brighthelmstone."

"At——?"

"Brighton! I shall never accustom myself to so new-fangled a name! With extreme delicacy, having already paid for it, she has offered the house to me, and I'm inclined to accept the offer."

"Brighton!" Martina's face was radiant.

"Wait, miss, and pray don't interrupt! You're not going to London this season as a punishment for your ill-behaviour! But that's no reason why your mother should be condemned

to spend months of damp down here at Camelos ! Aunt Dorothea's house is roomy, and modish, being situated on the Marine Parade ; William agrees with me ; if you undertake to behave yourself I'm moving the household to Brighton in a week's time ! ”

Martina thought immediately of George.

“ I promise to behave,” she declared, in her warm, musical voice.

Lady Rainsborough continued to regard her fixedly.

“ When I talk of the household, Harriet, I include the boys and their tutor. If we are to live free at Brighthelmstone—at Brighton—there is no reason why they should cause me expense here at Camelos—fires, candles, washing, food ! ”

“ Indeed, no, ma'am,” Martina said to this, with an air of great intelligence.

“ Then, reflect, pray, that the eyes of the world will be upon you ! You're lucky, Harriet, to have a second chance—make the most of it ! You may incline your head when you meet the tutor, but that is to be the limit—I forbid all conversation ! ”

“ Thank you, ma'am,” Martina returned, not without irony, but the irony was lost.

“ I shall invite Sir John to visit us,” Lady Rainsborough continued, almost to herself.

She was happy at the thought of a little gaiety. She would be able to gamble at Brighton. Only for low stakes—she could not afford to play high since William succeeded his father, but she loved to gamble. And William, at Brighton, would meet some splendid heiress ! Harriet would return betrothed to Sir John ! And the boys—the boys should bathe every morning ! Sea-water, she had always heard, was beneficial to the health !

“ Then that's arranged,” she exclaimed with satisfaction, “ you've promised to be a good girl, and you may run along now to Mrs. Betty ! Tell her, by the way, I'll need her later in the still-room ! I have much to do ! ”

Martina, dismissed like a small child, lingered in the hall for a few moments hoping for a sight of George. She looked

for him in the library, but it was empty, and she had no idea where to find the schoolroom. Rather disconsolately, for the house seemed deserted, she found her cashmere shawl and wandered out into the garden.

Standing on the great stretch of shaven lawn that led to the edge of the lake, she suddenly perceived someone moving behind a clump of huge and sombre cedars. Her eyes were sharp; she recognized George, and ran to find him.

"Why aren't you looking after your little boys?" she demanded.

"Don't shout! Someone will hear us! Listen—come to the rhododendron-walk—no one can disturb us there! The brats are out riding with Rainsborough!"

She followed him in silence, for his voice was peremptory, and his mouth looked stern.

Once in the rhododendron-walk he caught her wrist, almost twisting it in his vehemence.

"Martina! I've had enough of this charade!"

She stared at him. His eyes were like blue lightning. He had never, before, been angry with her.

"What?" she cried, her voice incredulous. "You've had enough of this—in one night! How could you have so little spirit of adventure?"

"You love it, don't you?"

"Who wouldn't? And, George, I've got something to tell you——"

"Would you enjoy yourself quite so much if you'd been born a penniless governess in this household?"

"Well," she answered with spirit, "that wouldn't have been much change for me, would it?"

George returned moodily, ignoring her:

"If I were Rainsborough, I'd stick it with pleasure. He's got ten good horses in his stables, and two racing-curricles! He obviously has the hell of a good time! But as the tutor, Taylor—no, I'm damned if I'll stay here!"

"And if I'd been Lady Barradale," Martina retorted, "I'd have been happy enough in the twentieth century!"

"You know perfectly well you'll be Lady Barradale one day if you'll only have a little patience!"

"Isabel——" she began, and stopped short. The name of Isabel meant so little to her, then, that the very mention of it made her feel slightly ridiculous. What had Isabel to do with an April day in Regency England?

CHAPTER XXXIV

"YOU MUST LISTEN, first," she said instead, and hastened to explain the Brighton project.

But George, like a small boy, kicked sullenly at the gravel beneath his feet.

"I'll not play tutor at Brighton or anywhere else ! It's asking too much !"

"Then what do you want me to do ?"

"Come to the temple to-night !"

"Listen, George," she remarked suddenly, "there's something you haven't thought of, and I haven't, until this moment. The book, the old book, hasn't been buried yet. You said yourself it wasn't put there until Victorian times ! It must still be in the library where we said the spell that changed us !"

"I shall get it immediately !" George declared. He was shocked ; he turned paler.

"You don't seem to love me very much lately !" Martina reminded him, her eyes flashing, her cheeks crimson. It was, so far as they knew, their first quarrel, and both detested it, but both were angry, and their tempers flamed.

"I love you," he said, "as Martina Forest. Not as Harriet Fane ! Not as this poor little fool of a ghost who's been dead more than a hundred years ! Can't you realize you're not the same ?"

"What about you ?" she inquired disdainfully, controlling herself by a mighty effort. "It seems to me you were only charming when you had plenty of money !"

"I've a great mind to box your ears !"

"Isn't it true ?"

He looked at her intently for a moment, and then he smiled.

"Darling, you'll have to forgive me! To tell you the truth, I sat up late last night, with Rainsborough, and I got drunk . . . I feel like hell!"

She gazed at him, her lips parted. Tears suddenly brimmed from her eyes to fall, splashing, upon the delicious curves of her cheeks.

"I'll get the book at once!"

"Oh, no—not yet! And don't cry! You see, I'm going to Brighton!"

And he took her in his arms.

"You look so lovely in these dresses," he murmured, his lips caressing her hair; "you must always wear them when we go back . . . now I believe I love Harriet as much as I love Martina. . . ."

"It won't kill me if I don't go to Brighton," she murmured, her lips on his.

"I wouldn't miss it for anything! I love the way, darling, we talk so calmly of crossing time! To us it has become as simple as flying to Paris . . . to the people here, one would be as mystifying as the other!"

"George," she said, troubled by a new fear, "suppose that after all we don't belong together?"

"I don't understand."

"Suppose I belong to this time, and you to the twentieth century? You might be a ghost, or spirit, here, just as I may have been—unreal, in that other world? We might have been allowed a few moments out of all eternity to be together——"

"You're ridiculous, my sweet! We belong to each other."

"We don't know," she argued, trying to conceal the panic in her heart. "How can we know? We might have belonged to one another centuries ago—when Arthur was King—anything you like, and then we might so easily have lost ourselves in time——"

"We will never lose each other again," he told her, "and now I'm going to see that book of ours is safely in the library . . . did you know, by the way, that Mrs. Betty, your duenna,

is a devoted friend of mine? That should make things easier in Brighton, don't you think?"

"I should be with her now," Martina recollected, without enthusiasm.

"Darling," he said, releasing her, "if I catch you flirting with that beefy squire of yours, I shall knock him down, I warn you!"

"Oh, no!" she cried, immediately apprehensive. "He'd only fight a duel with you; he'd kill you! Please leave him alone!"

"Very well," George agreed lightly, "so long as you leave *him* alone! Don't say I haven't warned you! Will you contrive five minutes in the library after dinner to-night?"

"Yes, I'll try. George, I've got such a good idea—it's suddenly come to me!"

"What is it?"

"Why," she cried, so proud of herself that she almost crowed with joy, "when we're at Brighton we'll get married!"

"Get married? How—without anyone's consent?"

"We'll elope. We'll run away to Gretna Green!"

And she looked at him with happy, confident eyes. But George did not return her gaze.

"No fear!" he retorted brusquely.

"What do you mean?"

"I haven't got a penny. How do you imagine I'd support you? You must be mad!"

"You're always talking about money! Can't you forget it for a moment?"

Once again their love, lashing them, transformed them into enemies. Their eyes, that had been softly brilliant with the devotion they felt for one another, once again became stony with dislike, and their lips, that had clung together with so much passion, now looked shrewish, and they stepped deliberately away from one another, almost with revulsion.

George said, frost-cold:

"In Venice, if I may remind you, you swore at me for despising money. Oh, yes—you did, and you needn't shake

your head ! You laughed at me, because I never had to scrape and save ! ”

“ That,” she cried in a fury, “ wasn’t nowadays. That was the twentieth century ! ”

“ Yes. Our own time, Martina—don’t deceive yourself ! ”

“ No ! ”

“ Oh, yes ! *Our* time, my sweet ! Please believe that ! You’re having a grand holiday, aren’t you—as a handful of dust ! ”

“ I’ll burn the book ! You shall never get back ! ”

He laughed, looking at her beneath his lashes. His pallor seemed uncanny ; he was alabaster-white. He rocked on his heels, laughing at her rage ; his own eyes were dark, as he regarded her, but his smiling mouth was bitter. His smile, to her, was cruel.

“ You won’t burn the book, sweetheart, because I’ll get to the library before you ! And, in any case, how could you burn it ? Let’s be reasonable ! It *wasn’t* burnt, you see ; it stayed here in the library for many years ! You can’t really alter time ! Oh, no, Harriet, you could never burn that book ! Poor, spoilt Harriet ! You think yourself so powerful, don’t you ? ”

She said, desperately, clutching at a dignity that belonged entirely, perhaps, to Harriet Fane :

“ You wanted to marry me, not long ago ! You were set on it ! But if you’re afraid we’ll not discuss the matter any further ! ”

“ Wait ! ” he exclaimed, catching her hand.

“ Wait ? For what ? ”

He said, in a mocking voice :

“ You’ll be glad enough, after Brighton, to seek our temple, and our own time ! I’ll give you rope with which to hang yourself ! You won’t need much more ! Just wait ! ”

“ Why can’t we get married at Gretna ? ”

“ Because,” said he disdainfully, “ I can’t, at the moment, support your ladyship ! Is that clear ? ”

“ It makes no sense,” she answered coldly, “ somehow

we'll make do. Don't you agree? Look at William, who's so in debt! And I, when I was little—but you've forgotten how to play, haven't you, since we came back here?"

He frowned.

"My childhood, ma'am, was possibly of briefer duration than your own."

"Can't you ever think of anything new? You've said that to me before! Why may we not marry, up at Gretna Green?"

"I've told you. I've no money!"

"Don't you think it almost indecent that we should wander together through time without ever being married?"

He grinned then.

"Charming, my dear—very charming! But scarcely practical. We'll marry when we go back—when I'm free!"

"You shan't order me about, whoever you may be! If you won't marry me now, I'll never marry you!"

"Lady Harriet," he told her calmly, "must have been something of a shrew when she grew older, don't you agree?"

Secretly he was amazed by the rapid change in her. She had only existed, so he argued, for twenty-four hours as Harriet Fane, and yet he detected a new confidence, a grace and insolence he had never known before. She was certainly more beautiful, lovely, delicate, in that diaphanous dress in which he longed to paint her. Her skin, he thought, had never been so flawless; her eyes were clear as sea-water, and there seemed, that April day, to be more bronze mingled with the darkness of her hair. That she had, in the twentieth century, been overworked and undernourished, did not occur to him, but it was idle to deny that her Regency masquerade had not improved her.

Looking at her, he desired her more than ever, but he was afraid. He had no wish to be sent away to Devon, far away from her—and from the temple—with only a few shillings in his purse. He was still confident that they had travelled backwards, not forwards, in time and he was anxious for the return journey.

She declared, tossing her head:

"Poverty doesn't suit you, Mr. George Taylor!"

"You needn't flash those green eyes at me, Martina-Harriet! I refuse to gallop away to Gretna pursued by young Rainsborough and your red-faced squire! They're likely enough to own pistols, and to know uncommonly well how to shoot!"

"Very well," she agreed, with immense disdain, "you don't have to marry me, if you don't want to. But don't forget it was *you* who wished for us to be free!"

"I admit that. But listen—it's different—you're as good as engaged now! You weren't engaged then!"

"No . . . but you were married!"

And her eyes were as cold as his.

"I see. You're determined to quarrel!"

She stamped her foot.

"*You're* determined to spoil everything! Just because for a few days you're not George Barradale! I never knew you were only sweet just because you had everything you wanted! I thought you loved me! And now—now when I'm enjoying this more than I've ever enjoyed anything, you try to ruin——"

He pulled her towards him and kissed her. He kissed her several times, and when at last he released her, her lips felt bruised, and she stopped storming, to put her hand to her mouth.

He said at last, unsteadily:

"So you thought I didn't love you? If I wasn't afraid of being separated from you, I'd show you more than that! Far more! You're too damned attractive to creep about courting penniless tutors in shrubberies! One day you'll get your deserts, because, believe it or not—I love you! Now run away—we'll only get caught if you stay here!"

She gave him an uncertain look, then prepared to obey. After walking a few yards down the path, she turned.

"You will try to meet me for five minutes in the library after dinner?"

"Yes, if you'll stop playing the spitfire!"

She went without another word. So did he, but by another

path. He knew the grounds, and arrived at the house before her. He slipped into the library, where he spent an agonizing ten minutes searching the bookshelves. At last he found what he wanted. Slipping the old, shabby volume beneath his coat, he walked majestically upstairs towards the schoolroom.

But on his way he paused to hide the book beneath his mattress.

■

CHAPTER XXXV

THE NEXT FEW days were so abandoned to the bustle of departure that they had little time in which to meet. A few snatched moments in the library or in the gardens, a few whispered words; stiff phrases, and furtive glances, when they met, however briefly, before the others. The strain of this separation had, of course, one immediate effect; their joyous loving of one another became a passion burning all the stronger for its forced concealment. Then, each one, solitary, would think bitterly of the other. She, because he would not gallop away with her to Gretna. He, because she loved these old, lost days, and seemed to dread a return to what he thought of as their own time.

Then, lying awake in that ancient house, separated by a labyrinth of corridors, a maze of coiling staircases, they would think feverishly of one another, almost with hatred, so that their sleep, especially his, became fitful. She had, at least, the consolation of that luxury she had always desired; sometimes, when he judged her most harshly, he thought her entirely enslaved to the comfort she had never known as Forest's daughter.

Meanwhile, John Russell treated her with a consideration for which she was secretly grateful. He came frequently to Camelos, but he talked no more of love. He spoke to her of crops, and herbs, of his cattle, his housekeeper, and of the news from France. Once again, despite his dullness, she appreciated his kindness. She regarded him rather as she would have regarded a handsome, benevolent ox.

She said to him:

"You're coming to Brighton, I hear, during our visit?"

"Yes . . . but . . . I fear your London *beaux* will find me countrified, and stupid, too."

"I have no London *beaux*."

"I'm afraid," he said gravely, "you soon will have ! That's what I'm afraid of. That, and the strangeness of Brighton."

"What do you mean ?" she asked.

He hesitated.

"You see . . . I may seem insular to you, ma'am ; I've never made the Grand Tour. First, my inheritance prevented the journey, and then these cursed wars with the French. I've seldom left my home, as you know, save for visits to London, but Rainsborough tells me Brighton's damned modish, since the Prince built this Arabian Nights palace, and, well . . . I was never fashionable, as your brother is, and I can't remain away when we cut our hay, you know !"

"Oh," Martina laughed, "can't you give up your hay for a little fun ?"

"My pleasure," Sir John assured her, "must come after the hay ! Then I shall expect more diversion than I can hope to tell you !"

But Lady Rainsborough refused to allow any nonsense about hay ; they would be back at Camelos, she declared, in any case long before the beginning of June. And so Sir John was to follow them to Brighton a fortnight after their arrival. He would stay with Rainsborough in private lodgings.

George, idling in the schoolroom, listening to his pupils' chatter, wondered glumly where he would be housed. In a garret, probably a leaking one——

"Sir !" and young Francis Fane interrupted his gloomy reverie.

"What is it ?"

"I've finished my Latin. Now tell us about the machines !"

"I'll draw you a picture of one," George volunteered, "if Peregrine will fetch me pencil and paper."

He had no particular objection to the boys, who were undisciplined, rough as puppies, and handsome enough, with

their straight limbs and clear-cut, olive faces. Some days ago he had learned that so long as he drew different 'machines' for them they were as wax in his hands. He had learned, too, a variety of other matters, some more agreeable than others. He had learned, for instance, that it was no longer possible to order a hot bath by pressing a bell; he bathed every morning in cold water, and once in a while coaxed the housemaids into bringing boiling cans up to his room. It was the same with his clothes, for he had never been accustomed to look after himself, and the supercilious men-servants held a tutor in contempt. But fortunately for George the housemaids were all in love with him; they were his slaves; so that no linen was fresher than his own, and no coats more creaseless. He was better groomed than Rainsborough.

The servants often talked of him in the kitchen and the still-room. He was supposed to cherish a hopeless passion for that 'gad-about,' Lady Harriet, and the maids sighed luxuriously when they spoke his name, thinking his pale beauty romantic enough to die for. He was pale, in actual fact, not only because he desired Martina, and was unaccustomed to being thwarted, but because the shock, the mystery of what had happened to them both, affected him far more than it had affected her. She seemed positively to flourish on the change.

"What is that strange object?" Peregrine now demanded, breathing heavily down his tutor's neck.

"If you don't sit down, I won't finish it!"

"Sit down!" Francis commanded, scowling at his junior.

"It's called a carburettor," George condescended to explain. "It's for——"

The door opened, and Martina came tempestuously into the room, her arms filled with jonquils. She had never before visited the schoolroom. She wore a dress of lilac gauze, and there were cherry-coloured ribbons at her waist. Her swift, airy grace, her foaming frills, the almond-pink whipping her cheeks, that armful of sweet blossom clasped against her breast, made her so much a part of spring that to George's brooding

fancy she was spring itself, broken through a world of ghosts to beckon him away from shadow into all the fairness of the April sunshine.

He rose slowly.

"Your ladyship," and he forced himself to sound mocking, "does us an uncommon honour!"

"Oh, Harriet, don't come here now!" Francis exclaimed impatiently, "just as——"

"Be silent!" George thundered, and once again Francis frowned. He was a sullen, sensitive lad.

"I thought," Martina said composedly, "that it would be diverting for you here, amongst so much ink and grime, to see these flowers—the first this year!"

And she watched him, her eyes as gay as her speech was demure, above the sheaf of jonquils. Already their piercing sweetness hung in the air, and he returned her glance for a full moment before he spoke.

"I'll get a vase," he said, still looking at her.

She perched herself on the edge of the table.

"Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Taylor, sir! Perry—pull the bell! There's a maid to attend on you here, I believe?"

"You'll dirty that fine dress!" George told her, in a low voice.

"What does it matter? I have so many others!"

And her eyes mocked him.

"Harriet," young Peregrine demanded, "why don't you come here more often?"

"My schoolroom days are over, Perry!"

A young housemaid, one of George's many admirers, came panting into the room.

"Two vases, please, for my spring flowers!" Martina demanded.

"Yes, your la'ship. In a moment!"

Looking over her shoulder at George, Martina's smiling lips framed the question "Gretna?" He pretended not to know what she meant. Francis, drawing on his slate, watched them, hostile, beneath his lashes.

"Used you to study here, with Mrs. Betty?" Peregrine wanted to know.

"Of course! For many weary hours—look, can't you see H A R cut into the table here? She caught me, before I finished, and put away my knife! I had bread and water for supper, I remember."

The little boy smiled, tracing the deep-cut letters with an inky finger.

George inquired:

"I suppose you really believe that?"

"Aren't the letters clear enough? Do you presume to doubt my word?"

He said, to punish her:

"I know where you found those jonquils . . . they grow in the little orchard beyond the yews. It's sunny there, and I used—like you—a long time ahead—I picked them, then——"

She punished him, then, her head high.

"I suppose *you* really believe that?"

The little maid came back, carefully bearing two water-laden vases. She returned, subsequently, to an enthralled still-room to report that "her la'ship" looked angry, and as though her cheeks were painted, while Mr. Taylor was "sorrowful," just standing there gazing at her "as pale as moonlight."

The door closed, regretfully, behind her.

"I gave my word," George flamed in a cold fury, "as to the Brighton project . . . your behaviour makes me regret my pledge!"

"Brighton won't last long," she declared, skilfully arranging the jonquils, "whereas your witchen temple will endure till kingdom come!"

"Thanks be to God!"

"Is that the temple by the lake?" Francis suddenly inquired, looking up from his slate.

Both were troubled, having forgotten him.

"Do you ever go to the temple, Francis?" Martina inquired, carelessly.

"No! Why should I? Harriet, have you seen my ferret?"

"You must show it to me, one day."

"One day, one day! You forget we're going away!"

"Not for two days."

"I don't want to go away," Francis announced, resentfully.

"Nor do I, then!" Peregrine echoed.

Martina laughed, looking at her flowers with a critical eye. George, in silence, watched her.

She said to the boys:

"You don't want to see Brighton? You don't want to learn to swim, or to find shells and seaweed on the beach? Or to see the Regent's fairy-palace?"

"There are no fairies nowadays," Francis told her, sulkily.

She laughed, thrusting one last flower into a vase.

"Don't you be so sure, Francis! Ask Mr. Taylor!"

Francis said, staring at her:

"When I was little, Harriet—still in frocks—I remember you talked of fairies to Nana, once when we were picking cowslips! I didn't believe then—I'd rather have had my ferret, and my pony!"

"So would I!" the faithful Peregrine echoed.

"Well," she retorted, with a glance at George, "if my advice is so little appreciated by any of you gentlemen, it seems to me I might as well retire to Mrs. Betty and my own apartments!"

"Ma'am——" George began, but with a mocking bob of a curtsy, she fled. But not far, for he caught her, in the passage, grasping her arm with little kindness.

"One moment, Martina!"

"What is it? Be careful—the boys are listening!"

"What do I care! There's something I want to tell you!"

"You're hurting my arm! What is it?"

His eyes blazed, like blue jewels. He was, indeed, as the little maid had said, pale as moonlight.

"It's this," he said, "at first I thought you were play-acting, just now, when you came in with those flowers!"

"What do you mean?"

"Now, I'm not so sure. I half believe you're serious. That's what frightens me ! I didn't mind, when you were just acting."

"I don't understand you !"

"I think you understand me pretty well. You've kidded yourself, properly, haven't you, that you really are Harriet Fane ? Made yourself believe it, because it suits you, haven't you ?"

"You let me go !" she cried.

"Just one moment, my dear ! To my way of thinking, you're on the border-line of something dangerous ! Be warned, while there's time ! You can't split yourself like this—that ends in lunacy ! You'll have to make your choice for good, when we get back from Brighton ! You can go now—but don't you forget what I've said !"


He released her wrist, roughly.

Her colour ebbed with her rage, and there was no pink left in her cheeks as she stabbed back :

"I'll do as I please, and I'll live where I please !"

"So will I," he answered serenely, and added : "Personally, I shall live in the twentieth century ! Thanks for your visit !"

And he strode back into the schoolroom, banging the door behind him.



CHAPTER XXXVI

THE DEPARTURE FOR Brighton took place on a morning of April sun and showers.

Rainsborough was not with them. He had driven to London, two days before, and would join them in Brighton a few days later. Lady Rainsborough's party were not to pass through London. She had planned a rambling journey, during the course of which they were to lie two nights on the way. She, Martina, and Mrs. Betty, were to travel in one postchaise; George, with his young charges, in the second; the servants by coach.

They left Camelos soon after the stable-clock struck nine. Sir John Russell rode across the fields to say good-bye; he would join them in ten days' time. The two chaises, one drawn by a pair of bays, the other by greys, stood waiting on the gravel sweep outside the front door. These were the days when a gentleman's private carriage was never driven from the box; two postillions, attenuated in skin-tight breeches but splendid in jackets of scarlet and gold, stood near the chaises watching with monkey-like, jockeys' faces the grooms standing at the horses' heads. The two chaises were painted dark claret, upholstered with cushions of fawn. The doors of both were emblazoned with a crest and coronet. The bay horses were fresh and troublesome; they were showy, well-bred, under-worked creatures. George inspected the greys thoughtfully—he knew they went every day to the village. He knew, through Francis, that they were hunters only six months broken to harness, and they stood soberly, while the bays fretted. But he was not sure, after inspection, that he did not prefer them; one was dappled, the other flea-bitten; he liked their clean

legs, their fine shoulders, their wise, sensible, hunters' heads.

While he watched, Lady Rainsborough, in midnight blue, with a chip bonnet, gave directions from the steps—his own steps, he reminded himself, moodily—and Mrs. Betty, in rose-pink, her locks still silver-powdered, flew in and out of the front door with picnic-baskets, a spaniel, novels, fans, and vinaigrettes. Martina wore her lilac gauze, and swung a bonnet by its cherry ribbons; catching George's eye, she winked at him; he bowed austere, but could not resist winking back. Francis and Peregrine chased their greyhound, argued about ferrets, and boasted of the rooks' eggs they had snatched, perilously, the day before, when their tutor was supposed to have been supervising their activities.

Upon this genial scene advanced Sir John Russell, riding a favourite roan hunter. For a moment he watched, shading his eyes with his hand, for at that moment the sun blazed forth upon the shining carriages, the burnished, fretting horses, the glittering postillions, the women, gay as butterflies upon the shadowed steps, and the boys with their leaping greyhound, their joyous, shouting laughter.

It was then that the stable-clock boomed the hour of nine, and George started, as he always started, now, when he heard that damnable sound.

Sir John slid from his horse, tossed the bridle to a groom, and sauntered across the gravel towards Lady Rainsborough and Martina. While George watched, he kissed their hands, smiling, and made some pleasant, courteous inquiry as to the arrangements for their journey.

"Hullo, sir!" Francis yelled, gnawing an apple.

"Hullo!" Peregrine echoed, shrilly.

Sir John turned, to wave his hand to them. Then once again he addressed Lady Rainsborough, while George strained his ears.

"With your permission, ma'am," he heard, "I'd like to escort you as far as Banbury."

'Damn you!' George thought.

He watched Martina, as Lady Rainsborough nodded a gracious assent. She smiled, too, as though with grave pleasure, and her eyes were downcast ; but when Sir John insisted upon carrying Mrs. Betty's parrot to the box-seat, she flung a swift, mischievous glance towards him, and once again George could readily have wrung his neck.

"Mammy, Mammy!" shrieked the parrot, in raucous dismay. The grooms smothered grins, and the two boys burst out laughing.

Sir John, mopping his brow, strolled towards the second chaise.

"Don't forget," he said, jovially, "I expect you lads to swim like fish, when next I clap eyes on you!"

As he spoke, his eye fell upon his rival, the tutor. That damnable tutor, he thought, forcing himself to nod affably.

"Morning!" he said.

George accorded him a curt bow.

"Good morning, sir."

Sir John pretended to talk to the boys. He presented each one with a half-guinea piece, but, out of the corner of his eye, he continued to watch George. That damnable tutor! He disliked everything about the fellow—his haughty bearing, his cool manner, his mocking smile, and, worst of all, his undeniable romantic beauty. God! The fellow, Sir John thought, should have been a play-actor, or a melodramatic poet! Yes, that was it—a poet—had not Harriet's old playmate, Lady Caro, shown herself even more foolish than Harriet where a poet was concerned? Matters, Sir John thought, nodding absent approval of Francis' rooks' eggs—matters had come to a pretty pass when ladies of quality came to prefer these damned dandified fencing-masters to hard-riding fellows like himself! And Harriet——

"Francis, you are not to pester Sir John," the tutor commanded, not without amusement.

Sir John glanced up, a lowering bull.

"Eh? The boy don't pester me, Mr.—er. On the contrary!"

'The name's Taylor,' George informed him, smiling. He added: "I think we're off!"

This was true.

The grooms gave the postillions a leg, and the postillions sprang upon their horses. Lady Rainsborough disappeared into the chaise, followed by her daughter, and by Mrs. Betty, still gesticulating violently.

"Come, boys," George said, and turned to Sir John.

"A pleasant ride, sir!"

"Thankee."

Sir John climbed upon his roan and trotted away dutifully after the first chaise. Horses clattered, dogs barked, the peacocks screamed, and at the lodge-gates a woman and three little girls waited in a row to curtsy to their betters.

Sir John rode up to the carriage window, but there was more dust than he would have supposed, for the time of year, and Harriet would not look at him. She dropped her eyelids, and appeared to sleep. Lady Rainsborough tatted, busily, while Mrs. Betty conned a list of silver, her brows knitted. Charming companions! How much he wished he had never offered to escort them! But he disliked, more and more, the thought of that cursed tutor following in the other carriage. That cursed, smooth-faced, insolent tutor! Lady Rainsborough must be mad to drag him in her train after what had happened at Vauxhall!

But Lady Rainsborough, he reflected bitterly, was a selfish, fashionable female, no better than she should be, according to London gossip. And young Rainsborough was a rake. Poor Harriet! How much he longed to rescue Harriet from her odious, if noble family! He longed, too, to rescue her before she became what he would have described as 'tarnished' by the cynical, fashionable world of London and Brighton. Brighton, of all damnable places! And that impudent cub of a tutor!

So much did he excite himself with these reflections, that at length he bent down over his saddle to stare ardently inside the chaise at Harriet. But alas! it was warm, that morning,

and he wore a winter coat ; his face was red ; when, at last, his breath clouded the window-pane, and Harriet became aware of his scrutiny, impossible not to notice that, unseen by her mother, she stuck out her tongue, pulling a street boy's grimace.

Almost purple, he drew up his horse, to ride, more decorously, behind the chaise. He, too, would have liked at that moment to strangle Harriet Fane.

"*That's* better !" Martina declared, with a sigh.

"What is better ?" Lady Rainsborough inquired, without raising her head. She was still tatting furiously. She only tatted when she travelled.

"Oh . . . it's cooler, now."

Mrs. Betty looked up, puzzled, from her inventory of silver, but Martina only smiled. She was passionately anxious to watch this pageant of a younger, sweeter England from her window, and Sir John's face, bobbing up and down like an apple at Hallow-e'en, had infuriated her almost as much as the tutor infuriated him.

'He *would* have to spoil everything !' she thought, angrily, and, to Mrs. Betty, "Ma'am, won't you please to change places with me ? I don't mind sitting with my back to the horses !"

"Nor I, dear," Mrs. Betty replied, once again snatching herself, so to speak, from the silver, "in fact, I prefer it, so we'll not dispute the matter further !"

A few minutes later, Martina was able, after some persuasion, to pull down the window beside her. Then, indeed, she was spell-bound by all she saw. The unspoiled green freshness of a tranquil country-side as yet undefiled by the horrors of machinery, thatched cottages squatting like mushrooms behind plots of garden that were already patchwork-gay. Bare-footed children chasing the carriage in hope of pennies. Shaggy-headed boys in smocks, leading teams of glossy, elephantine horses. Turnpike gates, and village inns, gypsy tents pitched beside the road, and, once, the triumphant blaring of a horn, as a monstrous dragon coach, green-painted, drawn by smoking horses white with lather, swept past them with

a clatter, a jingle, a rumble, all of which reminded her, with a second's discomfort, of the dark nightmare she had endured in the temple.

But if only George had been beside her, her happiness, that morning, would have been unclouded.

CHAPTER XXVII

GEORGE, DESPITE HIS interest in what he saw, was annoyed to perceive, every time he craned his head from the window, the stolid back view of Sir John Russell, jogging persistently behind the first chaise.

"Bloody fool!" he muttered beneath his breath.

"What, sir?" Francis inquired, alert.

"I was talking to myself."

He felt ridiculous, effeminate, shut up like a woman in a closed carriage. He thought that he would have given anything, that morning, for a horse of his own. He would have liked, then, to ride away with Martina on his saddle, and had she made the slightest objection, he would have enjoyed beating her.

But she would not have objected.

When he thought of her brazen effrontery in suggesting a Gretna elopement, he turned pale with fury. Her casual desire for mad adventure really appalled him. Her one wish seemed to be that of marooning them together in Scotland, without a pennypiece, hundreds of miles away from the temple, and with the possibility of his own immediate murder, if not at the hands of Rainsborough, then surely at the hands of Russell!

So much unnecessary melodrama, he thought, when they could easily have returned to the twentieth century, where they would live peacefully together—in comfort—until Isabel decided to divorce him! He shook his head, contemplating Martina's folly with a moody darkness. Never once did it occur to him that both their characters had changed, with their altered circumstances; he was now, courting Harriet Fane,

suffering from much the same inferiority-complex as she had endured in loving Barradale. Now she was the favoured child of the gods, while he seemed less than dust, but he could not, for the change had been too violent, begin to comprehend this alteration with any degree of common sense.

All he could think was that Martina had lost her head ; the ghost of this girl from the past appeared completely to possess her ; she *was* that girl ; their souls were identical ; their mocking, stubborn minds as one.

He had himself been appalled by the enchantment worked in the temple ; he had drawn her there, superstitiously inclined towards some fatuous love-spell ; now that time had revolved for them, and they were cast, as changlings, into an epoch remote from theirs, he was afraid that he had lost her ; he knew Prince Charming's role so well, yet could not, even to please her, play the beggar-boy.

But how, otherwise, could he capture the spirit he called Martina ? She had frightened him, during that last conversation they had had together ; she had hinted that she belonged to this earlier epoch, while what she called the future was his ; she had pretended that they were permitted a brief dream, snatched from all eternity, before they were for ever parted. He shivered at the thought, for she meant more to him even than before their change, but the thought persisted, humming like a wasps' nest in his brain, so that he was half-demented, and it seemed to him that never—no matter in what time—would he find the peace he so much desired.

Martina had first appalled him that day in the schoolroom, when she chattered so glibly to Peregrine of her childhood. He saw, then, for the first time, that she sincerely believed herself to be Harriet Fane, and his quivering fear had caused him to lose his temper. For he, who was supposed to be a darsen's son from Devon, could remember nothing before that half-forgotten evening when he met her in the library of Camelos, to read a book of spells upon her birthday.

When he thought of his childhood, he thought of old Herries ; of holidays upon the yacht, of toy motors and aeroplanes, and of

his first car, when he was up at Oxford. He knew, triumphantly, that he was no tutor ; he was Barradale. He supposed that she knew, just as triumphantly, she was Harriet ; that was the difficulty.

He thought, then, as many people have thought :

“ Why did this have to happen to me ? ”

When he looked out of the carriage window and saw rustic lovers, arms entwined, wandering together down tranquil lanes, he envied them with the very blood of his heart. They were together ; they were free to love ; they had never known, would never know, the dazzling misery of being thrust across time into the limbo of infinity.

His only consolation was the shabby book, which, nowadays, never left him ; somehow, to end this nightmare, he would drag Martina behind him into the temple, and force her, on her knees, to accept the time that to him meant sanity, and then, together, they would for ever lay the ghost of Harriet Fane.

For he knew, that, if she lagged behind him, she could not alone find that world of the future.

He had never, before, been jealous of any woman. In fact, jealousy, to him, was a new, bewildering experience. Loving Martina, watching her blossom into a vivid beauty, had inflamed his love until now it poisoned his very soul. Yes, his soul, and he was not accustomed to think of souls ! But this love of his was robbing him of chivalry, and charm, and thoughtfulness—in fact, of all the qualities that were his when he was rich, and favoured by the gods.

His love had become an angry, aching thing that gave him no rest ; he was like a dog for ever licking his sores. And he thought that if he must continue to watch her flirting with her rubicund squire, he could no longer control himself, but would swiftly kill the creature. He had never, before, considered murder, but as the chaise bowled along toward Banbury he knew that killing John Russell would mean no more to him than setting fire in November to an effigy of Guy Fawkes. John Russell had been dead for more than a hundred years. He was simply a guy.

"What's the matter, sir?" Francis inquired suddenly.

"The matter? What do you mean? Nothing's the matter!"

"You were looking devilish put out," observed Peregrine's childish treble.

"Was I? Well . . . I hate travelling in chaises!"

"Mama wouldn't let us bring our ponies," Francis declared, resentfully.

George scowled.

"I'd like to drive you boys at ninety miles an hour in my new car!"

"Yes!" Peregrine exclaimed, gleefully, "tell us more fairy-stories about machinery! Tell us about the flying ships!"

"Her ladyship wouldn't like it," George objected, still frowning.

Francis laughed.

"Do you suppose we tell secrets to Mama? Or to Mrs. Betty? Or to Harriet? Of course we don't; William warned us long ago never to tell secrets to women!"

"Or to Sir John, I humbly suggest!"

"Don't you like Sir John?" Francis inquired, with curiosity.

"Like him! Sir John knows his place, and mine; he's a gentleman, and I'm your tutor!"

"Is he in love with Harriet?" Peregrine demanded.

"Do you think he is?"

"Oh," Peregrine explained, bored, "I heard her woman, Emily, talking to the still-room maid. That's all."

"Never listen to servants' gossip!" George advised, between his teeth.

"Well, William said so, too," Francis volunteered, watching his tutor keenly.

George said nothing—he could not trust himself to speak. Turning his head, he tried to watch the pageant of a long-forgotten country-side unroll itself before his eyes, but his heart was beating fast, and anger choked his throat; the

country-side to him was no more real than so many acres of tapestry ; he started, when Francis exclaimed :

" Banbury at last ! "

' And that,' thought George, ' means the end of Russell ! '

The chaises stopped outside the Reindeer Inn.

The bustle of running ostlers, dismounting postilions, clattering horses, screeching chickens, and barking dogs, made all conversation impossible until Sir John ushered them into the private parlour where, as he said, he had bespoken lunch.

They ate in a dark, oak-panelled room decorated with antlers and sporting-prints ; they ate roast beef, chicken, pork-pie, and apple-pudding. George, unwilling guest of Sir John, would have enjoyed refusing every dish, but this was not possible ; he was ravenously hungry.

Martina, who had been happy enough before, glanced once at his face, and was immediately frozen ; she knew that devil-look of his, and she was afraid ; her gaiety was swiftly quenched ; she dared scarcely exchange a word with her host.

Mrs. Betty, sitting next to George, whispered :

" What's the trouble ? You look fiercer than a demon ! "

" And feel it ! Don't bother yourself, ma'am ; I'm just in a bad humour ! "

" Sir John," Mrs. Betty murmured, " will shortly be leaving us ! "

" And shortly be joining us—in Brighton ! What do you think I'm made of—flesh and blood—or sawdust ? "

Mrs. Betty sighed.

He was so angry, this young man ; his face was a white, twisted mask. And she could not imagine how to help him. Despite her loyalty, she was forced to blame Lady Rainsborough ; she could not understand how her patroness dared to travel so serenely with these two, just as though nothing had ever happened between them. His face, and Harriet's, were proof that they were still passionately in love with one another ; watching them, she resented Lady Rainsborough's lofty indifference, and then she dreaded the thought of Brighton.

She said :

" Really, you know, Mr. George, you would be much happier if you left us ! "

" Do you think I don't know that ? "

She hesitated.

" Harriet, you know, would be happier, too, in the end. "

" I see. You'd like her to marry that prize lump of beef at the head of the table ? "

" What else is she to do ? "

" She knows. Oh, don't upset yourself ! I'm not talking elopements—as you conceive them ! But Harriet . . . her remedy's in her own hands ! "

" I don't understand you, sir, " Mrs. Betty told him seriously.

" I don't blame you ! No one does but Mar—but Harriet ! And she's caught up in some damnable dream—but forget it ! Things will come right for us—somehow ! "

Watching his strained face, his blue, glittering eyes, she found no way of agreeing with him ; nor did Harriet's stormy countenance in any way reassure her. She knew, then, something she had never before admitted even to herself ; Lady Rainsborough, she realized, ignored everything that displeased her ; she shut her eyes, refusing with a cold stubbornness, to accept anything likely to disturb her peace of mind. This tutor was cheap, and therefore she was indifferent. That was the trouble—she was indifferent. Once having decided to marry Harriet to Sir John, she did not care whether the tutor was there or not.

The misery that she was causing meant nothing to her, because, for her, it never had existed. She was a woman of the eighteenth century. Let Harriet marry John Russell and then, if she wanted, and was able, let her take the tutor as her lover ! Who cared—so long as she married ? She would have children, and sooner or later children needed a tutor ! The solution, to Arabella Rainsborough, was simple. She was not really sorry for Harriet, for she herself had dreaded her own marriage, yet how little, after a short time, had that marriage

vexed her. She was not even sure whether the younger boys were Rainsborough's. Sometimes she had her doubts, but she would never know for certain. In any case, what a fuss about nothing !

Thinking of her marriage, she would smile, indulgently, remembering the hell that had been her honeymoon. One had thought, then, in one's ignorance, of suicide—how extraordinary ! For one became accustomed to anything, and she had so soon been pregnant—not with William, but with a still-born child. And then her lovers . . . and Rainsborough, too . . . but one became accustomed to anything ! That was marriage, that was life, for a woman. That would be Harriet's life, too, and Harriet would soon settle down, after those first, trying months.

Mrs. Betty, glancing at her mistress, realized some of these thoughts, and was afraid for Harriet, knowing Harriet better than her mother. Poor Harriet, who was dying of love. And Mr. George, such a gentleman, despite his situation, who tortured her so much with his desperate eyes ! Poor children ! Poor, poor children !

And somehow she could not bring herself to like Sir John Russell. He seemed to her coarse. Coarse, and material, and too stupid for Harriet. How could he ever understand the wildness, the sweetness, that was Harriet ?

She started.

Everyone was rising ; Sir John was saying farewell ; in a moment they would be on their way.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THEY LAY TWO nights at inns where George, forced to share a room with his exuberant pupils, behaved very much like some Etonian god burdened with two incompetent fags. His temper was unreliable; he gave Francis six with a hair-brush for waking him their first morning.

He had only one conversation with Martina during this nightmare journey.

That was one afternoon before dinner, when Lady Rainsborough was resting and Mrs. Betty confined to her room with a headache. The boys, cramped and fidgety after so much travelling, ran off at once in search of birds'-nests. George sat in the parlour, puffing away at a new investment—a long churchwarden pipe. He did not like it, but at least it was tobacco. Martina came in and remarked:

"I'm a little disappointed in these inns, aren't you? They're not nearly so comfortable as I thought they'd be. What a fantastical pipe!"

Her casual manner was scarcely calculated to soothe his furious discontent.

"I'm glad," he said, rising, "that you've found something you don't think perfect about this damnable epoch . . . thanks, too, for exchanging a civil word with an old friend! I shan't forget this act of graciousness!"

"George, did you see the man in the stocks, this morning?"

"I did. I also saw, yesterday afternoon, a gibbet. Did you? It was not in use, but it was scarcely a pretty sight. At least, not to my mind. But perhaps you thought differently?"

She came towards him impetuously. The frilled hem of her dress rustled as it slid across the brick floor.

"Why," she demanded, "are you talking to me like this? Like a stranger? What's the matter now?"

"Oh, come off it, Lady Harriet Fane! I've had about enough of my betters!"

"You've been in a filthy temper ever since we left Camelos!"

"Camelos, and the temple."

"In fact, you aren't enjoying your journey?"

"You're right, I'm not. I'm hating it like hell!"

"Oh, George!" and she blazed into a rage, "you've got less imagination—than anyone I ever knew!"

At this moment the landlord walked in, and she paused, her cheeks vivid, her eyes green flames. The landlord was a stout man with three chins; he wore breeches, grey worsted stockings, and a dirty apron. George addressed him curtly:

"Two glasses of Madeira, please, and don't come back after you've served them—I want a little privacy!"

"Very good, my lord," answered the innkeeper, not unnaturally supposing this haughty young man to be the Earl of Rainsborough. George turned to Martina.

"You were saying?"

Her anger left her.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't mean to lose my temper. I hate you being miserable."

"I wouldn't be so miserable if I ever saw you!"

"I know," she agreed, seriously, "it's my—it's Lady Rainsborough. She's forbidden me to speak to you. If she found us together she'd send you away at once. Probably she'd send me away, too. She's always holding some 'aunt from Chelsea' over my head, as it is. And then we'd lose one another."

"I see," he said, forcing himself to be calm, "we'll just have to wait until we get back from Brighton, that's all."

"Yes," she agreed, "that's what we'll have to do." She added, "it must be hell, being a tutor! I'm so sorry—don't think I'm not sorry, just because I happen to be enjoying myself!"

"And Russell?"

"Oh . . . I don't enjoy that! He won't take No for an answer!"

"Can you wonder that I hate his very soul?"

"No," she answered, sighing, "I can't. But what does he mean to us—nothing!"

"Martina, don't you ever get frightened?"

She considered this, her dark brows contracted.

"Frightened of what?"

"This devilish juggling with time! This messing about with something unknown! We're going to pay for it, you know! Say what you like, we're going to pay for it!"

The landlord brought in the Madeira, and they drank in silence.

"I'm sorry," she said, "that you feel like that."

"Don't you?"

"No. Not at all. Don't glare at me, George; I can't help it, if I'm not frightened! And I should be—I started the whole thing by reading that book to you, in the library."

He had no intention of telling her that nowadays this same book never left him. He said, instead:

"I only wish I could understand what you find to like in this pestilential epoch! Tell me, Martina, while we're able to talk—what is it you like so much? It can't be the comfort, because there's just a top-fine layer of luxury, and then—dirt! The people are stupid and narrow-minded. The travelling's damned uncomfortable. Candles drip on your fingers, tepid bath-tubs aren't my idea of fun, and I resent retiring to a cess-pool for more intimate purposes! To-day we saw a poor devil locked in the stocks, and that empty gibbet of ours may dangle a corpse to-morrow! And did you notice the beggars who chase the carriages? No, Martina; this world's hideous! It stinks! Once I thought it would be gracious and lovely, but it's not! It's not!"

"You forget one thing," she told him composedly, putting down her glass.

"What's that?"

"We've got security, here. There wasn't much of that in your world of the future."

"What do you mean?"

She looked thoughtfully into her glass.

"Well, George . . . when Waterloo's fought, three years from now, only those who become professional soldiers will suffer. The civilian population will be safe. Women and children won't be bombed. There won't be poison gas. Nor will men be suffocated in tanks. That's your modern world, and if you think it's so civilized, I can't agree with you. This one seems healthier, to me."

"Yes," he said, "and supposing you were suddenly attacked by appendicitis?"

"I'd die, of course. But, in your world, I'd probably be bombed to death. There are risks everywhere—I prefer these!"

"A world with no anæsthetics, no hygiene, no surgery, and a curse of smallpox! You're welcome!"

"Do you prefer death from the skies? Motor smashes and dictators and bombing aeroplanes?"

He smiled, struggling to re-light his churchwarden.

"It's hell, any way we look at it! Why were we ever born?"

"Perhaps," she murmured, in her honey-sweet voice, "because we were born to meet one another, and that's certainly worth something, although you've been as sour as a quince ever since we left Camelos!"

He threw away his pipe, then, and drew her towards him, kissing her.

"My darling, that's only because I'm worried about what's going to happen to us. That, and the fact that we're never allowed to be together!"

"Let's run away," she coaxed, "let's elope, as I suggested . . . please, George!"

"No. That I refuse to do! I've got two guineas in the world."

She smiled, sliding her arm round his neck. She put her lips close to his ear, and whispered:

"I believe Mrs. Betty would lend us some money . . . she's on our side. . . ."

"No! Martina, stop talking nonsense! You know I won't consider that."

She left him, abruptly.

"Very well. We won't talk about it any more. As usual, I'll give in to you! When we come back from Brighton, we'll go to the temple. We'll smell petrol, again, and the radio will scream of war——"

She stopped.

A commotion outside announced the helter-skelter arrival of Harriet's brothers.

"Damn those brats!" George muttered, as the boys flung themselves into the parlour. They were jubilant; Francis bore in triumph the minute egg of a long-tailed tit. During the turmoil Martina vanished.

Later that evening Peregrine asked his sister:

"Do you love Mr. Taylor, Harriet?"

Fortunately they were alone. She answered, carefully:

"I like him very much. Don't you?"

"Liking isn't loving," Peregrine answered gravely. He added: "I hope you love him, Harriet, because he's a better fellow than Sir John, although Sir John gave me half a guinea. Francis likes Sir John better, Harriet, but I don't. I wish you'd marry Mr. Taylor, but Francis says you won't. He says you couldn't, because he says Mr. Taylor has no family. What does that mean, pray?"

"It means," Martina told him, "that Francis is a disgusting little snob!"

"And I'm not?"

"You're sweet!"

She kissed him warmly.

"I love Harriet," he told his brother, later, when they were in bed.

"Why? She's only a girl."

"She's so pretty!"

He fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE HOUSE IN Marine Parade was graceful, respectable, and modern. It was removed from the brilliant Steyne, and stood in a quiet street, where ladies of quality could take the air without being pestered by bucks from the more sophisticated part of the town. The best bedroom was naturally appropriated by Lady Rainsborough; Martina and Mrs. Betty shared the second best, while the boys slept above, and George occupied a tiny room leading out of theirs. The servants were lodged in a rookery of garrets, and they grumbled bitterly.

There was a study for the boys, a drawing-room for the ladies, and a dining-room where, at meal-times, George and Martina eyed one another discreetly across the table. These rooms were simply but exquisitely furnished in the taste of the period, for the house belonged to a fascinating young lady—a sister of the notorious Harriette Wilson—and had recently been decorated by one of her richer admirers.

Martina had read many books describing the Regency period, and indeed it had always fascinated her, but nothing she had read, not even Miss Wilson's memoirs, had prepared her for the gaudy, glittering parade that was Regency Brighton.

Near the front, the austere beauty of tranquil squares fringed streets thronged with splendid figures, carriages shining like mirrors, glossy horses, braided grooms, gold-encrusted postillions, dresses brighter than the wings of humming-birds; star-spangled muslins; coats of every shade from bottle-green to mustard and violet and cramoisie and a blue so cerulean that the sea, by contrast, shimmered silver-grey. Diamonds blazed, snuff-boxes, vinaigrettes, and quizzing-glasses sparkled, in

the sunshine, as the gorgeous crowds passed to and fro in a languid and ever-changing panorama.

Martina thought, seeing them for the first time in all their glamour, that these were surely figures from the stage, moving behind footlights, in the theatrical radiance of limelight; then the wind blew a tang of seaweed across the Steyne, and she knew that they were real, these splendid people. They were real, and Waterloo would not be fought for three long years.

It was none the less a shock to see for the first time—she had never seen it in her modern life—the Pavilion. She saw it for the first time on a day heavy with swan-like clouds, so that the swarm of bubble cupulas seemed to melt into the air above. For a moment her jaw dropped; she gazed, disenchanted, at swollen, bulbous domes resembling nothing so much as clusters of gigantic onions. Her dream of fairy casements opening to the seas, of graceful, floating minarets, vanished then for ever; she stared upon the monstrous vulgarity of a Caliph's palace as it might, in her modern life, have been conceived by Hollywood, but she thought Hollywood would have designed it better.

Later that day she expressed her disappointment to George, and to her surprise George disagreed with her.

"You must at least give the Regent credit for creating something new. He's never been to Fez, or to Russia, or to Greece; he's never seen Milan Cathedral. The Far East, to him, is no more real than Arabian fairy-tales to us. Yet he's tried to create the East. If he's failed, as he could scarcely help failing, we should at least respect him for trying to build a palace from a piece of Chinese wall-paper!"

In a few days time Rainsborough arrived, driving a blood-horse in a curricule that must, the two combined, have cost his mother more than she could well afford. He went into modish lodgings on the Steyne where he was joined, a week later, by Sir John Russell. Russell, incidentally, was paying for the lodgings. The squire's arrival finished for ever George's interest in Brighton or in contemporary England.

Nor was Martina over-pleased to see him. By this time,

although she had not as yet visited an Assembly Ball, she was enjoying a marked success with the fashionable young men frequenting Brighton. Her success was not, as Lady Rainsborough well knew, the normal one of any marriageable young woman. She was exciting as being a friend of the notorious Caroline Lamb's, and as being herself—as Harriet Fane who had run wild with a tutor and who had been caught red-handed drinking with him at Vauxhall, the pair of them masked and tipsy.

To Regency society, so cynical and yet so naïve, Harriet had been, of course, the tutor's mistress. There was simply no other explanation of her fantastic conduct. Therefore, from a fashionable point of view, she was no longer eligible for the worldly marriage she would once have been expected to make. But since she was slender, vivid, and green-eyed, she excited even more interest in the gentlemen of Brighton than had she been eligible. What a puppy of a tutor had done could surely be achieved by a gentleman! That was their attitude, and although she was perpetually chaperoned by Lady Rainsborough or by Mrs. Betty, there was not a man in Brighton who would not have liked to boast to other bloods that he had conquered Lady Harriet. The career of that other Harriet, or 'Harriette,' was hers for the asking; as an earl's daughter her success as a courtesan in those days which, despite their cynicism, were in some respects strangely innocent, held glittering prizes undreamed of even by Miss Wilson.

Martina, naturally shrewd, soon realized this for herself. Nor was Rainsborough backward in telling her, with brotherly frankness, the reputation she had won for herself.

"You see, Harry, you've got to be damned careful with those fellows. They all think Taylor was your lover."

"He never was!" she declared, angrily, and so far, despite their travels in infinity, this statement was true.

"Then marry Russell!" William advised, glancing at her with the light eyes so like her own.

She smiled, engagingly.

"To pay your debts, I suppose?"

"Oh, damn my debts! But look—there's Raikes and Craven, and Bentinck, and Luttrell; they all chase after you, but none of 'em will marry you—well, Russell wants to, and they'd stop chasing you, once you announced your engagement to him!"

"Perhaps," Martina suggested mischievously, "I like their attentions!"

"Be damned to you for talking so loose! No wonder——"

"Now, William," she coaxed, "if you were a young woman, would you really enjoy settling down for life with Sir John?"

He grinned.

"Harriet, don't pester!"

"But would you?" she persisted.

He patted her hand, awkwardly. Already she knew well enough how to manage him, this sullen brother of hers.

"I'm not a girl, dear," he said, "and you'd have made a fine boy, but that's neither here nor there. You happen to be a girl, and you've made a bad reputation for yourself. Only solution's marriage! You seem to think it's such a tie, Harry, but, 'pon my word, I assure you——"

She interrupted:

"Were Mr. Taylor rich and well-born, William, would you still hate him?"

A curious expression crossed the young man's face. It vanished in a second, but she was well trained in observation, and she did not fail to remark that strange, uneasy look.

"Oh . . ." he said, with an odd laugh, "I don't dislike Taylor! What makes you think so? He's—he's a devilish uncomfortable fellow—I suppose that's his scholarship—and then this story of Vauxhall . . . but, as a matter of fact, I'd like him were he—well, were he not so rum, and all that."

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

"I don't know," he answered, reluctantly, looking down at his shining Hessians, "but I'll tell you one thing, Harriet—were this tutor your equal, and a millionaire to bargain, I believe I'd rather see you in your coffin than give you away in marriage to him!"

"You're mad!" she said, after a pause.

"Mad, am I?" he laughed, draining his sherry. "Perhaps I am. But I'm sure of one thing. Fifty years ago, that pretty tutor of yours would have been burned, for witchcraft! That I swear!"

He got up, wiping his lips with his hand.

Martina was considerably disconcerted.

"You're not to say such things! At least, if you say them, you're not to say them to anyone but me! People would think you queer-struck!"

"Me?" he laughed again, "no, Harry, not me. I love flesh and blood—when I love! I don't love——" he stopped, as though he thought better of his own frankness.

"Don't love what?" she persisted.

He picked up his hunting-crop, and opened the door.

"Don't love what?"

"The damned," he retorted on the threshold, and departed.

Martina rushed upstairs in a fury and refused to receive Sir John when he came round to drink what he described as a dish of Bohea.

She had already discovered that she had more freedom at Brighton than she had had at Camelos. The reason for her liberty was Lady Rainsborough's passion for play.

Every afternoon, and almost every evening, the woman she was beginning to think of as her mother went out to gamble at loo, or golden pharo. There, playing for hours with other impoverished cronies, she was wont, sipping her ratafia, to regret most bitterly the passing of the eighteenth century. Civilization, said Lady Rainsborough, had died, and they were living in an age of barbarians; they were vulgar, she said, where once they were subtle; Voltaire, she said, might never have lived at all. Byron, she said, was the god of to-day, and Byron, to Lady Rainsborough, was simply a *parvenu*.

She sighed once more, and then proceeded to regret panniered skirts, towering wigs, and vast, plumed hats. One's daughters, to-day, Lady Rainsborough shrugged, might as well go forth naked. Doubtless thinking of Vauxhall, and

of her own shameless daughter, her friends agreed, eagerly. Behind her back they criticised her, cruelly enough, for retaining the tutor who was supposed to have ruined Lady Harriet. She knew this, but was indifferent. She was too mean, or too pressed, anyhow, to care for aught but money. Harriet should marry Russell—of that she was determined. And then, if only William would settle himself, she would be free to live at Brighton, and to amuse herself, while her young sons, if William married well, should go to Eton.

“Your play, madam,” someone said, as she brooded.

She played, and won. She was a brilliant gambler, far more skilful than her son William, who plunged insanely, more often when he was drunk.

But how bitterly she hated this epoch of the nineteenth century!

“Those insolent French,” she remarked presently, “now can you conceive of a man like Nelson——”

She played, oblivious of what was happening in her household, for gambling, since the decline of her lovers, was what she most preferred in life.

CHAPTER XLII

SIR JOHN RUSSELL brought Martina's favourite horse from Camelos as a surprise, and it was inevitable that they should ride together upon the Downs.

Then it was that George, whose bitterness of heart was great, found himself involved in a curious adventure.

He was tramping along the beach one morning with his pupils. His spirits were exceedingly low, for the night before Martina had been with her mother to an Assembly Ball, and Mrs. Betty had made his morning hideous with a vivid description of her success. According to Mrs. Betty the gentlemen had flocked about Martina like wasps around a honey-pot; at least seven had wanted to 'stand up' with her for every dance, and his only consolation lay in the fact that, according to Mrs. Betty, she had quite ignored Sir John, who early retired—disconsolate—from the arena, declaring that he had "had enough" of Harriet Fane.

But George, the next morning, tramped dismally enough through the shingle, kicking at pebbles, sulkily indifferent to Francis and Peregrine, who, following him reluctantly, dabbling their toes in the sea, trailing seaweed, and splashing one another's faces with salt water.

A dog, rushing for a stick, dashed beneath George's legs, so that he nearly fell; recovering himself with an oath, he beheld a young woman, obviously the dog's owner, who appeared most anxious to apologize for this accident.

"Your pardon, sir! Toby is over-fond of sea-water! And now I fear your feet——"

"It doesn't matter."

He looked at her, scowling.

If she resembled someone he had once known in that world of the future, he was ignorant of this resemblance. He saw a tall, graceful young woman, wearing yellow, with a chip-hat; her beautifully dressed hair was auburn, her complexion was brilliant, and her dark grey eyes sparkled.

"Oh, but it does!" she said, earnestly, to this last remark. "I should never have let him off the lead, should I?"

His scowl became a smile. Isabel's type would always attract him. He knew, by the fact that she was unattended on the beach, that she was not what Lady Rainsborough would have called a lady. But she was charming, and he was lonely. Besides being lonely, he was miserable.

"In any case, your servant, ma'am!" and he bowed with a grace she found bewitching.

"Possibly you know me, sir?"

He shook his head. His eyes twinkled.

"Do you really think, ma'am, had I known you, I'd have been so backward?"

She tossed her head, laughing.

"Your ignorance, sir, is all the stranger because your face seems familiar to me."

"Would I could say *to quoque* to that, madam."

"I'm Chloe Laval."

And she looked at him frankly with her grey eyes, seeming to invite his incredulous astonishment. He hesitated, perplexed; he had never heard the name before, and he had not the slightest idea whether she was actress or courtesan, or both, or neither.

After a slight pause, she said, as though piqued:

"I take it, sir, you don't often visit the theatre?"

"Not for some time," he answered quickly, "to my infinite regret. But I've been for long in the country. Allow me, ma'am, to present myself—George Taylor, at your service!"

"Are those your brothers?" the lady inquired, indicating Francis and Peregrine, who were still dabbling perversely at the water's edge.

He shook his head. He did not feel inclined to explain his position to so personable a young woman.

She continued, talking as though they were old friends :

"I've been leading actress at the Lane all this winter. Comedy, soubrettes, Rosalind, Viola . . . now I'm here for a few weeks of sea-air. I have lodgings on the Steyne."

He thought he knew his cue.

"Perhaps, despite our unconventional meeting, ma'am, you'll permit me to pay my respects ?"

"By all means," Miss Laval answered casually. "I'll give you a dish of tea whenever you're at liberty. 29A is where I lodge."

They parted, then, and he watched her for a moment, frowning. It was as though some faint echo of what he thought of, unconsciously, as the past, stirred, like a tiny pulse, somewhere in his brain. George had been forgetting, too.

Walking back along the Parade he strove in vain to remember where he could have seen Chloe Laval. He decided that he must, in the world of the future, have seen her portrait.

"Who was that lady ?" Francis inquired.

"No one you know."

"Does Harriet know her ?"

"No !"

The next day Martina accompanied her mother to a tea-party, and he obtained permission from Mrs. Betty to take a holiday. He attired himself in Mr. Taylor's best suit, and, presenting himself at Miss Laval's lodgings, was at once admitted by a negro page into the lady's presence. The sight of this page, and of the silken, luxurious nest that was her boudoir convinced him that she must be a kept woman ; no Drury Lane salary of those days could have procured her so much comfort. In this surmise he was correct ; a rich and elderly baronet had been Miss Laval's patron for nearly three years, although they were frequently separated ; the patron possessing estates in the North which required almost as much supervision as Chloe herself thought fitting.

A wizened aunt, presumably retained as chaperone, having been shoo'ed from the room, the two settled down comfortably enough to drink their dish of tea. George relaxed,

in the presence of this beautiful and friendly young woman, as he had not relaxed since the beginning of his adventure. Whenever she talked excitedly there was a faint vulgarity discernible in her speech, and her laugh was a little loud, but he found her presence soothing after Martina's wilfulness. Furthermore, the sensation of having known someone like her, or a more refined counterpart of herself, soon ceased to trouble him after they had talked for ten minutes or so.

"I'm a painter, or trying to be one," he told her evasively, in response to one of her frank questions. He told her, too, that he was staying with friends on the Marine Parade. He had no wish to discuss the Rainsborough family. Nor had he any desire to reveal to this charming creature his present situation.

"You're very mysterious!" she laughed.

"I assure you I don't mean to be."

A few moments later she asked him if he was in love.

He was determined that there should be no misapprehension as to their relationship together. It had occurred to him once or twice that Miss Laval was finding Brighton more tedious than she had supposed would be the case. He therefore replied, emphatically, that he was in love.

"You don't look very happy about it," his new friend commented. She was watching him intently from behind her fire-screen. He was positively the most handsome young man she had ever beheld. She had, of course, been lying when she had told him, on the beach, that his face was familiar to her; it was not; he was, of course, unknown to her. But she had immediately been prepared to be fascinated, for this man, no matter in what time she met him, whether the world was young or old, whatever their respective situations, would always have the power to charm her heart away. A simple soul, despite her apparent sophistication, she had no idea why it was that the first sight of him should have troubled her so greatly.

She only knew, watching him as he sipped his tea, that afterwards all other men would seem uninteresting. They would be as night-lights compared to the sun. When he told

her that he was in love, she was assailed by a sensation of poignant melancholy. But she forced herself to sound merry as she said :

" You don't look very happy about it . . . "

" Happy ? " He considered this. " No, that's true. " I'm not very happy. Not at all happy, in fact. Let's talk about something more agreeable. Are you—— ? "

She interrupted, unable to keep the astonishment out of her voice :

" Does she not return your love ? "

" Yes," he said, briefly. " She does. It isn't that."

" Then . . . "

" Circumstances, ma'am. But I pray you let's change the subject ! Tell me something of your life at Drury Lane ! "

" Oh, that," she smiled, " that's hard work, as perhaps you know. It's not all bouquets and bright candles and champagne. It's——"

At this moment the black page threw open the door.

" Lord Rainsborough ! " he announced, and William came swaggering into the room.

George sprang to his feet, his composure for once shaken. It seemed to him intolerable that, having found one friend in this gaudy, muddled world, she should prove to be Rainsborough's friend as well. Could he never escape from this cursed family with which Martina had saddled herself ? Nor did he view with any particular delight the revelations concerning himself which Rainsborough would certainly pour into the ear of Miss Laval. Now she would hear the whole damnable Vauxhall story of which—since it had nothing whatever to do with him, he was heartily sick.

Chloe Laval, herself annoyed by Rainsborough's unexpected arrival, was astonished by the look of fury that flashed across Mr. Taylor's face. It was what she would have described as a ' duelling ' look. Then, glancing at Lord Rainsborough, she saw clearly, for one infinitesimal second, that he was horribly afraid. Only for one second, and then he recovered his habitual self-possession. But when he kissed her hand, his

own shook. She was puzzled, in the dark. Who was Mr. Taylor, that so proud a man as Rainsborough should hold him thus in fear ?

"Debts," she thought, "that must be it—debts. Rainsborough has lost to Taylor."

George made a mocking bow.

"Good afternoon, my lord ! Don't think I'm neglecting my duties ; I've permission to absent myself !"

Rainsborough muttered something in an effort to be civil. Now he looked not frightened so much as sulky.

Almost with defiance, about five minutes later, George took his departure.

She thought, with panic :

"I shall never see him again." And her dread gave her courage. She said gaily : "I hope, Mr. Taylor, sir, you'll call on me again ?"

"Thank you, madam," George answered, unsmilingly.

He was gone, and he had made no promise.

She ran to the window, oblivious of her other caller. There was no chaise, no curricule outside the door, and she heard no sound of horses' feet as she had heard when Rainsborough's curricule set him down. He was walking ; he could not even be rich enough to keep a carriage. And he was gone.

She turned from the window to Rainsborough.

●

CHAPTER XLI

SHE SAID ANGRILY :

" I never asked *you* to call on me to-day ! "

Deliberately, he took snuff.

" Where did you meet that fellow, Chloe ? "

" What business is it of yours ? You're neither my husband nor my lover ! "

" Taylor's my business. "

" Why ? Who is he ? "

" My brothers' tutor. "

" Oh . . . " At first this meant nothing to her, and then she remembered. Like many women in her position, she knew every scrap of gossip concerning the society ladies she had never met. Then, Mr. Taylor and Rainsborough's sister . . .

" Why," she said, slowly, " Lady Harriet . . . "

" Exactly ! Lady Harriet. Are you going to turn me away, Chloe, or will you give me a glass of Madeira ? "

Mechanically, she pulled the bell. If Lady Harriet was the woman Taylor loved, then she could well understand his unhappiness. That scatter-brained, spoilt girl who was supposed to have ruined herself for love of him ! How well Chloe understood, for one brief moment, Harriet Fane's folly ! Then she turned, struck by a new idea.

" But Lady Harriet—isn't she betrothed ? "

" Yes. " He spoke with obstinacy. " As good as. To Russell. "

She reflected. She had seen the girl once galloping like a mad thing on the Downs, in a green habit and a plumed hat, escorted by a heavy man with a florid face. Suddenly the

thought of Lady Harriet filled her with disgust, and she saw the girl as a selfish little wanton. To throw over George Taylor for a worldly marriage with that red-faced clod ! She would have liked, then, to scratch at Lady Harriet's eyes. Instead, she said to Rainsborough :

" You should be glad enough, in the circumstances, to see Mr. Taylor in my company ! I may not be so fine as your sister, but there are those who profess to see something in my charms ! "

Rainsborough said nothing, for the excellent reason that he was one of those to whom she alluded. He had, for some weeks, been trying, without success, to make love to her. Therefore, although in other circumstances he would have been delighted to find the tutor fickle, he had been furious to see ' the pushing fellow,' as he thought of him, in Miss Laval's company. Nor were these his only reasons for mistrusting George.

" What poor company you are, William ! " Chloe exclaimed peevishly, as he sat in moody silence.

He jeered :

" I suppose you prefer the tutor's ? "

She did not reply, and he looked up to see that she was blushing like a young girl. She was blushing, and her eyes were radiant ! She had never looked like that for him, and never would, although he wanted her more than he had ever wanted any woman. The raging, uncontrollable Fane temper rose up as though to choke him.

" Chloe ! Where did you meet Taylor ? "

" That's my business," she answered, waking sharply from her reverie.

" You like him, don't you ? "

" You might engage him to teach you manners ! "

" I thought so ! You're in love with him ! "

He was greatly excited. He sprang to his feet, and crossed the room towards her.

" Listen," he said, " there's something about him you *must* know. I've got to tell you ! "

"I wish you'd take yourself off!"

"Not before you listen!"

"I'll shut my ears!"

But he dragged her hands away, and held her imprisoned, so that she could not pull the bell. She struggled in vain against his voice.

"Chloe, *this* isn't jealousy, I swear! Taylor's not like other men—I know what I'm talking about! It's not your body he wants, although he won't say No to that—you fool, he's come for your soul!"

So great was her amazement that she ceased to struggle. She stared at him.

"Since when have *you* turned religious, pray?"

"Since one night at Camelos. We were alone together, drinking——"

"Oh, drinking!"

"You've *got* to listen! We talked of many things. He told the future. He talked of flying ships, and horseless curricles, and of the wars. He said we'd beat Boney in the Low Countries, and told me the very battle-field—I can't remember the name. And then . . . then we talked, or he did, of my house, of Camelos. He said, when I was dead, the people who came after me would pull it down, or most of it. Wait—I haven't finished!"

His face was damp with sweat, and in his eyes was a fixed look of terror.

"He talked, Chloe, as though *he'd* be there then, in the future, when all of us are dead and gone. He talked as though Camelos would be his then—he said he'd drink a toast to my bones. As I listened, a queer thing happened; I *felt* dead—dead and buried, cold from the grave, and my flesh crawled—damme—I looked down to see if I'd me shroud! And then I thought of rum tales I'd heard of Cagliostro, and that this Taylor must be the same, and then I stared up—oh, I admit I'd had some port—and the walls of my house fell like a pack of cards, so that I could see what he meant. I saw for a second that damnable future of his! I saw it, Chloe! I saw it!"

She wrenched herself away, for he was hurting her arms. She felt extraordinarily uncomfortable. She had known Rainsborough for some time and he had always struck her as a dour and self-possessed young man. This frenzy frightened her more than anything he was trying to tell her.

"You were drinking!"

"I drink every night, without looking into hell! I've not done that before or since!"

"What did you see?"

"Hell," he said again.

"But what?"

"I saw his flying-machines. Smoke and fire fell from them, so that people on earth were mown down like fields of thistles. There were sky-rockets in his world, like ours, but not like, for his destroyed, burned up great towns, like paper. I told you the walls of Camelos seemed to fall like a pack of cards—whole cities collapsed, as quickly, while he was talking. I saw vast ships, like lighted cities, and then some evil lightning struck at them beneath the sea, and they were gone, and all who sailed on them! I saw men, clockwork men, ugly as if they were made of iron, Chloe, thousands of them, dead, blown away like dust, by these damnable machines he raved of!"

"It was a nightmare!"

"And my house! I haven't told you that. My home was ravaged, torn to pieces. It was built again—and that was worst of all—everything was strange and wrong. There were screeching machines racing on the lanes outside the park, and the park had grown smaller, and the gardens weren't mine, and I was lost in the house. In my own house! But Taylor wasn't lost, Chloe. Oh, no! He was there, in my place, giving orders, like the devil he is! He was there, in dark, ugly clothes, and he lolled always in *my* place, playing music! Devils' music! He pressed his hand against the wall, and ghostly operas performed for him! Isn't that witchcraft? Isn't that sorcery?"

He was suddenly calm, for this torrent of words seemed

to have exhausted him. He sat down, wiping his white face. At last he was quiet. And then she said, trying to make her voice sound casual :

"Have you told Lady Harriet this story ?"

"No," he said, "there's no need."

"What do you mean ?"

"What I say. *She's* not in danger."

"I don't understand."

He was already suffering from the reaction of his outburst. He looked sick, as he poured himself another glass of Madeira.

"You needn't repeat what I've told you, Chloe."

"For your sake, I won't."

"Do you think I'm queer-struck ?"

"I think you're not yourself."

"Would *you* be yourself, if you'd looked into the pit ? What do you think I felt, when I came in here to-day and saw that fiend with you ?"

There was much that she did not understand. But she was a shrewd woman, and persistent.

"Why don't you mind him living in the same house with Lady Harriet ?"

"I do ! But all that's over."

"I don't know what you mean. Even if they no longer love one another, if this man is what you say, why am I in more danger than she is ?"

He got up.

"I'll get some air, walking back. When my curricie calls, ask your black to send it to my lodgings. I've overstayed my welcome——"

She interrupted him with small ceremony.

"William, why do you think me in greater peril than your sister ?"

He hesitated, but she was insistent.

"Having told me so much, you must tell me more. Why are you afraid for me ?"

He gave her a cunning look, as though to see if she were

making fun of him. But she seemed serious, and so he blurted out :

"I didn't tell you all I saw. There was something else ! When he owned my house, in this devil's world of his, he was not alone. There was a woman with him. She wore a strange dress. He ordered her about. She was possessed by him. He'd got her soul, as he always meant to get it. I saw her clearly. She wasn't Harriet."

"Well ?"

"She was yourself."

She was silent as he closed the door behind him.



PART FIVE

CHAPTER XL

“LORD RAINSBOROUGH,” GEORGE commented, “has a more vivid imagination than one would have believed possible.”

It was two days later, and he was talking to Chloe Laval, who had summoned him by letter. She had done this because she could not help herself. She had to see him again. And, having seen him, she had told him everything William had told her—with one exception. She had not told him that, according to Rainsborough’s dream, or vision—she was to share the future with him. Her pride forbade this, but she told him everything else.

And, having confessed, she watched him anxiously. He looked pale and tired; his beauty she thought a little dimmed, but he did not burst out laughing, as she had expected. He fidgeted with his fob, and seemed bored; she thought him on the verge of smothering a yawn.

But his last remark angered her. She looked up at him, her grey eyes bright.

“What a pretty frock,” he said, a note of animation in his voice.

“Mr. Taylor——”

“George.”

“George, then! Surely you must have some reply to Lord Rainsborough’s accusations? Are you going to—to sit there and allow him, in our days, to taunt you with sorcery? You *must* reply! Your—your honour demands it!”

He smiled, with great sweetness.

"How nice of you, dear Chloe, to concern yourself with my honour!"

She controlled herself with an effort.

"You *must* reply! This tale will soon be known all over Brighton—London—everywhere! Don't you understand the harm it may do you?"

He sighed then.

"But I have no reply," he told her.

For a moment she felt faint. She had been standing. Now she sat down, gazing at him, her mouth slightly open. She looked younger; her red-gold hair was disordered, and she had not painted her cheeks. Perhaps that was why she seemed so pale.

George smiled at her, but his eyes were serious. Surely, he thought, he had enough to endure without this imbecile story of witchcraft! He had scarcely seen Martina for two days, and that evening she was attending an evening party at the Pavilion. He was tired and nervous, and he had come for comfort to Miss Laval, only to find himself confronted with childish accusations of sorcery. Suddenly he determined to confide in her; he had nothing to lose, and since Martina was out enjoying herself, he would rather be with this woman than with anyone he knew.

He said again:

"I have no reply. What Lord Rainsborough says is true enough."

"You mean you're—you're——"

"Oh, I'm not the devil—don't be absurd! But I'm an intruder from another world."

Chloe Laval—it was not, needless to say, her own name—was by no means an educated woman. She was the daughter of an obscure actress and of a young rip. She had not had much schooling. Confronted by George, she felt her heart thumping like a big drum. She was sure he must hear it, and know her for the craven she was. It would seem so, for he said crossly:

"Oh, don't *you* be afraid, too! You've nothing to fear! I'm more frightened of you others! Pity me, Chloe, but for God's sake don't be afraid of me!"

To her surprise, she heard her own voice sounding clear and strong.

"I shall never be afraid of you," she said.

"Thank God!" was his reply, and then: "You're so like someone I used to know, or thought I knew. I wish I could remember——"

But now she was well under control. He was not to stray away from his story. She looked at him squarely.

"Where do you come from?"

His eyes met hers with equal honesty.

"I come from the future. From a world not yet born."

"Lady Harriet . . . does she know these . . . these theories of yours?"

"She does. None better. She's had a taste of them herself, and likes this world better. All the same, she belongs with me there. She doesn't belong here either."

Her jealousy of Harriet Fane made her feel faint. Surely, surely he was mad! Then she remembered that Rainsborough had not seen his sister in the vision he had described. Chloe, herself, had been the woman beside him!

"She's as bad as you!" she cried suddenly.

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"Lady Harriet! If you're a wizard, she's a witch!"

"Oh, get that damned nonsense out of your head, if we're to talk! Mar—Harriet and I were lovers in the future—more than a hundred years away from now. We were unhappy then, too; we decided, or rather I decided, to try an experiment with time. We thought we'd be better off in—in these days. You see, we were always in love, and my wife——"

She started.

"You're not married, into the bargain?"

"I am married," he admitted, not without coldness. "I married before I met Lady Harriet. That was the trouble."

She reflected, her brain spinning. Two women of whom to be jealous !

"What's she like, your wife ?"

He hesitated.

"That's just it," he said awkwardly, "one forgets this other time. One forgets more every day. I can't remember my wife. But I do remember we had a devil of a row. About—about Harriet."

"If this rigmarole is true," she said, humouring him, "what are you going to do ?"

"Go back," he said, "or rather go forward, where I belong. To my own world, with Harriet."

"But you said she didn't want to—to leave here ?"

"Oh," he said lightly, "her head's turned. She never had much of a time, where we were. But she'll go soon enough when she knows I'm serious. You see, we don't belong here."

Her lips felt dry, as though they were cracking.

"I should never see you again, if that happened ?"

"Alas ! no."

"You shan't go !" she declared suddenly, "you shan't go to perdition ! That's what Rainsborough says it is ! He says you come from hell !"

He smiled.

"Hell to him, perhaps, as his world is hell to me. I should have stayed where I belong."

The room seemed to rock and sway when he had finished speaking. Everything swam in a haze before her eyes. Her silks and rugs and gleaming satins, her wrought French clock, her silver tea-pot, her tiny jewelled bird in its gilded cage.

Then, once again, she was strong, and spoke her mind.

"You're a fool !" she cried. "*I'd* go wherever you wanted ! I love you more than Harriet Fane !"

There was a pause.

George, already weary, was stupefied. He started back. He gaped at her. He had had, he thought, too much to endure. That his friend—his one friend—should now wish to wreck their friendship by declaring this hysterical love for him was

more than he could stand. There was no one, now, in whom he might trust. He was incapable of speech; he continued to stare at her.

"I beg your pardon," she said at last, "I shouldn't have talked like that. . . ."

She tried to speak with dignity, but his obvious distress horrified her.

He muttered at last:

"You see, Harriet, as you call her . . . Harriet and I . . . we've got to be together over this . . . we've got to go back to where we were, the two of us. . . ."

And he averted his eyes.

"I suppose," she said faintly, "Rainsborough was right. . . ."

"Right?"

"When he said you came from hell."

"But he was wrong! He——"

"Oh, yes—you're a fiend all right! I'm a stupid woman—I've had no education, but I see you're not like us. I wish I'd never met you—that's what I wish! Will you please go away?"

"Certainly," he answered stiffly. He stood up and flung on his cape with a single, angry gesture.

"We're leaving Brighton soon, you know," he told her over his shoulder.

"Perhaps in London—at the Lane——"

He laughed then.

"Oh, no, my dear! I shan't be there! You'll never see me—after Brighton!"

She looked at him steadily. Now that he was going, she did not very much care what she said.

So she said:

"I love you, and you don't love me. No matter! One day I'll get you! You can't love as I do, and have no return."

His face was a white mask, above the darkness of his cloak. But his eyes seemed to mock her.

"You think I'm so evil," he giped; "well, there are two of us together, Harriet and myself! Don't forget that! I

thought we might be friends, you and me, but it seems we can't. That's not Harriet's fault, or mine. We belong together, and no one can interfere. No one! Not even you, although you're beautiful!"

He moved towards the door.

"Some day," she said, "you'll be paid back for this! Don't laugh—some day you will! Some day you'll come back to me!"

They were in the hall now, and he laughed.

"I suppose it's your turn to read the future?"

He opened the door, and a wild wind came rushing in to rattle and clatter about the house.

"You're really going?" she asked.

"I'm going."

She flung her arms about his neck. She was trembling, but she thrust her mouth onto his.

His lips were cold. She cried:

"When the devil comes to take you, he can have me, too!"

He laughed, evasive, pinching her cheek. He did not return her kiss. Then the wind roared in a shrieking gust, and the door was shut, and he was gone. She was alone. But he had left his voice, that was still part of the wind.


She was sure then that he was mad.

His personality, when they were together, almost made her believe in his wild tales.

But she believed them no longer. He was mad. And she was alone.

The fire glowed, bright as buttercups, in her sitting-room, but she was alone for the first time in her life.

She would be alone for all her life.



CHAPTER XLIII

MARTINA, THAT EVENING, attended an evening party at the Pavilion. She wore white gauze, sprinkled with silver, and there were silver stars powdering her hair. She attended the party with her mother, and with her brother William. Sir John, that simple squire, was not commanded. The Regent, who liked to consider himself informally at home at Brighton, only invited the people with whom he was acquainted at Carlton House. The Rainsboroughs were poor and in debt, but it would never have occurred to him not to invite them. The family had been, for as long as he could remember, part of his own distracted, gaudy, and brilliant world. Lady Rainsborough, indeed, had first known him as Florizel, the handsome, graceful prince of Perrault's fairy-tale.

He was not handsome now, nor was he graceful.

He was coarse and florid of aspect. Already, 'Prinny had let loose his belly.'

But 'Prinny,' despite his girth, bore himself with the dignity he would never lose—not even in Scotland, where he wore a travesty of Highland dress, and still made Scots respect and cheer him. The interior of the Pavilion was, to Martina, even more fantastic than the outside; meekly she followed Lady Rainsborough through an endless parade of rooms, silver and scarlet and gold; they passed beneath pyramids of brilliant candles, twinkling in clusters from the vast candelabras above, that cast beneath them a thick, waxy heat difficult for anyone to support. Rows of powdered flunkies, immobile as wooden soldiers, lined these glittering rooms in all the splendour of their vivid uniform, and seemed like toys, until Martina saw one of them faint. He was bundled away in

shocked haste, as though he had committed sacrilege, which indeed he had, and then she shivered, despite the overpowering heat, and the Regent's kingdom was no longer fairyland.

His Royal Highness received them in the Chinese Gallery. He spoke to Lady Rainsborough with cordiality and charm, for she and her contemporaries would always, even in their decline, represent for him the fashionable world that once, long ago, was, with the aid of Devonshire House, so gaily conquered by Prince Florizel. He was heartily civil to William, but when he saw Martina sinking in a deep obeisance before him, he gave her his hand, retaining it long after she had risen from her curtsy. His hand was like a soft, warm cushion.

"Lady Harriet," he declared, "becomes daily more fascinating! And to think, madam"—to Lady Rainsborough—"to think I remember her playing with a doll at Soho Square!"

Lady Rainsborough smiled, watchfully.

The Prince suddenly, to Martina's astonishment, put his face close to hers—she sniffed brandy—and muttered:

"Don't play the fool, m'dear! Marry Sir What's-his-name! You'll make him a charming wife!"

The warm pressure of the Royal hand was relaxed—could it have been imagination, or was her palm really tickled?—and she was graciously dismissed from the presence.

The Rainsboroughs passed on to join a group of friends; footmen offered them refreshments, and once again Martina, sipping a cup of coffee, found herself surrounded by such fashionables as 'Apollo' Raikes, Craven, Bentinck, and Luttrell. But she was more serious than usual, and they missed her gaiety; this was her first experience of meeting someone she *knew* for certain to have been dead for more than a hundred years.

A gentleman with a broken nose, wearing plain black, accused her, half playfully, of ignoring old friends; it was not until Rainsborough told her she had been damned offish with Brummell that she realized to whom she had been talking; the queer, uneasy sensation of moving in a world of ghosts returned once more to haunt her.

It was then that she observed Rainsborough watching her in a furtive way. His brows were drawn, his face moody. She fidgeted beneath his gaze and under cover of a burst of laughter asked impatiently :

"What's the matter, William ? Why do you stare ? Have I a smut on my nose ?"

"I want to speak with you privately," he returned in a low, urgent tone.

"What a place to choose ! Why——"

"Oh, don't be so damned missish !" He caught her arm impatiently. He added, as she showed no disposition to obey him : "It's about Taylor. Is that good enough ?"

She said nothing, but she followed him without further argument. She had been thinking, as he spoke to her, of George ; how sad it was that experiences such as the Regent's party could not be shared by both of them ; half of the fun of everything, she discovered, lay in discussing it with him. This brilliant fairy-tale in which she moved would have been twice as gay, twice as fascinating, had he been there to share it with her. She missed his companionship, his sense of fun, his vivid powers of observation——

"Where are you taking me, William ?" she asked mistrustfully.

"Here. In the Green Drawing Room. It's too early for cards, and we'll not be disturbed."

She found herself in a blaze of green and gold. The room was fantastically elaborate ; tropically heated with the overpowering radiance of what seemed to her confused mind hundreds of wax candles.

She turned to Rainsborough.

"Why all this mystery ?"

He considered her, still frowning.

He was secretly more than a little in awe of his sister. Not only because she was quicker-witted and more intelligent than himself, but because he knew her to be possessed of tremendous courage. He remembered, for instance, how Harriet, in petticoats, had beaten over a five-barred gate a

young colt he himself had been unable to ride. And there was something else that he remembered. They had had a Scottish nurse, the Fane children, and this same nurse had once confided in William that Harriet possessed the second sight. Much as he dreaded Taylor, he was certain that Harriet knew how to control this sinister individual. Watching her intently, with the green eyes so like her own, he was convinced—perhaps because he wished to be convinced—that of all living people Harriet was the only one who need not go in fear of the creature he so much dreaded. Second sight? Perhaps Harriet, too, was witchen, perhaps their friendship was some unholy alliance known only to themselves, and to their master——

She interrupted these reflections with some impatience.

“What *is* it you want? If you don’t tell me I shan’t stay here!”

He made up his mind.

“Harriet,” he said, “do you know where the tutor takes himself every afternoon when Mama is out?”

“Where?”

“Did you ever hear of a woman named Chloe Laval?”

She had, of course, heard of Chloe Laval; Emily gossiped about her every morning. She returned Rainsborough’s gaze boldly, and with defiance.

“The courtesan? What of her?”

William, for his part, was so much annoyed to hear Chloe baldly described as a courtesan that he lost any remnants of prudence he had hitherto been at pains to conserve.

“What of her? Your precious tutor’s in love with her—don’t say I didn’t warn you! That’s what of her!”

She did not, as he had expected, fly into a rage; she was silent for a moment, then she asked quietly:

“Why do you suppose that?”

“I tell you the fellow’s closeted with her whenever he can sneak away from Francis and Perry!”

“And you’re jealous, aren’t you?”

“Aren’t you?”

"No." She shook her head and continued, speaking with firmness: "No, I'm not—I have no cause to be jealous."

"You're very sure!" he jeered.

"I have reason to be," she retorted, with more bitterness than triumph. For some reason her calm infuriated him, and he could have struck her.

"Have you, too, sold your soul, Harriet?" he demanded, a muscle twitching in his cheek.

"What nonsense are you talking?"

"I swear to you," he said, speaking very deliberately, "I swear to you on all I hold sacred that this man you call Taylor is something more evil than you, or anyone, can ever know——"

"Aren't you behaving in a very foolish way, William? You're like a child, afraid of the boggy-man!"

"Perhaps," he returned, as angry as she was, "perhaps you'll change your tune when I tell you that, by some supernatural power I don't pretend to understand, he showed me hell? Laugh at that, if you want to, and be damned to you!"

"Really . . . could one do otherwise? Pray, where did this exciting adventure take place?"

"At Camelos. Before we came here. In the dining-room!"

"You were drunk, as usual! I suppose you've been chattering all this nonsense to Miss Laval?"

"Yes!" he declared, now pale with fury, "I have, and I'll tell you why—it concerns her more than it concerns you, if you want the truth!"

"Indeed," she said, her eyes boding him no good, "and may I ask why?"

"You may," William blazed, now incapable of self-control, "for in this inferno of his he calls the future, the woman with him isn't you—don't flatter yourself! It is Chloe Laval!"

Here he stopped, in some alarm, for at his last words Harriet, with a sigh, had fainted dead away. She would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms.

It was, of course, unbearably hot in the Green Drawing Room.

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Lady Rainsborough held forth, the next day, to Mrs. Betty, while her corsets were laced: "My children are surely the most insolent, plaguey, good-for-nothing brood any mother was ever cursed with! There was Harriet—who looked ravishing—and William with any number of rich girls willing enough to be presented! And what do they do? Shut themselves up together in an empty room the entire evening, and someone overhears them quarrelling, and then, to make a pretty scandal, Harriet swoons! Vapours at her age! Where is she now?"

"Harriet's asleep," Mrs. Betty answered.

This, so far as she knew, was the truth. Harriet was certainly in bed, her face turned to the wall.

But Mrs. Betty was sadly perplexed, although she had not the slightest intention of confiding in her patroness—few people ever had—they might as helpfully have told their troubles to a marble statue. But Rainsborough had been talking to his old governess, of whom he was very fond, and it was the nature of his revelations that had so much disturbed her.

"But, William," she had whispered unwillingly, "if you really believe anything so—so terrible about Mr. Taylor, then you have no right to permit him to be with the boys, or—or meeting Harriet, even before us all!"

"I tell you he's a Satanist! He's what Cagliostro was—in my father's time the Hellfire Club was smashed for such as he, and those who'd dabbled in sorcery had to fly the country!"

"Then," Mrs. Betty repeated firmly, "you must speak to her ladyship. You are the head of the family. It's your duty."

He considered for a moment, and shook his head.

"No, ma'am, I'll have none of it! She'd mock at me, or call me mad, or fly at me because she gets the fellow cheap! No, I'll not tell her!"

Mrs. Betty was silent. It was the evening of the reception. They stood in the downstairs study, each one holding a candlestick. Save for these twin blurs of light, they were in darkness,

and she shivered. She was a woman of the eighteenth century. If William, child of a more modern age, so passionately believed this nightmare she could not help, although she liked 'Mr. George,' being influenced by Rainsborough's sincerity. So she shivered again, and declared :

" I'll not have Francis and Perry corrupted ! "

" Then speak to Mama ! "

" I won't promise. What cowards men are ! "

" I've told you—she'd only mock at me ! Look; ma'am, I'm meeting some friends, and I'm late ! "

He opened the door.

" Is—is Harriet quite recovered ? "

" I think she's asleep."

" Well, good night to you ! "

CHAPTER XLIV

SHE HESITATED, STANDING in the hall, her candle dripping grease. Knowing William and Harriet as she did, there was much that did not, in her opinion, fit his tale. It seemed to her incredible that the courageous, intelligent girl should have been so badly frightened by her slower-witted brother. Always, as children, Harriet had been the bolder of the two, and where he was occasionally cautious, she was habitually daring. Unless—and here the candlestick shook in her hand—unless Harriet had known all the time of her lover's sinister reputation. If this was the case, the shock of learning William's shared suspicions might well have caused her to faint. But——

At this moment the front door gently opened and Barradale walked into the house. She started, and nearly screamed; she forgot that she had given him a holiday.

The wind was high, and he shut the door carefully behind him.

"Who's that?" he asked, seeing the light, and then: "Oh, Mrs. Betty! You're up late, ma'am, but at least I can return the key you lent me!"

"Don't raise your voice!" she warned him, "they're back from the reception."

He picked up a candlestick and lit it from hers. He noticed that her hand trembled.

"They're early, aren't they?" he commented.

She looked at him without speaking. He seemed wild to her, and strange, in the darkness of the hall. The wind had blown his bright hair into elf-locks, and the face that had so much attracted her by its beauty was ice-pale. Had she known

of his interview with Chloe Laval, of his subsequent brooding in a tavern, and of his long walk by the sea, she might have understood both his fatigue and his sternness. As it was, seen by the quivering flame of the candle, he seemed menacing to her in the darkness of his muffled cape. She saw that a strand of seaweed had blown against his shoulder, but she made no effort, as she would have done an hour before, to pick it off.

He repeated, as she did not answer :

"They're back early?"

"Yes. Harriet was unwell."

"Harriet! What's the matter?"

There was a sharp edge to his voice, and she said quickly :

"Oh, nothing . . . a swooning fit. She's quite recovered."

He put the candle close to her face, and asked, with a harshness she had never before heard :

"What made Harriet swoon?"

Mrs. Betty knew then, very definitely, that she was in fear of him. Rainsborough was no fool; he would never have told such a frightful story had he not known more than he had admitted to her. A truthful woman, she at once decided to lie.

"The heat of the palace is proverbial! But you have no right, Mr. George, to speak so imperiously! Lady Harriet's ailments are none of your concern!"

He laughed.

"You know that's not true!" and then his voice changed.

"What's the matter with you? Why do you look at me like that?"

She felt her legs shaking.

"Really, sir . . . your manners. . . ."

He stared at her, his candle-flame burning steadily, so that it struck blue upon her face, that trembled, with its several chins, like a blancmange. He had seen the same look before on Rainsborough's face. He had seen it, for a moment, in Chloe's eyes. It was an ugly look, that flash of naked fear; already he had learned to dread it.

"Good God!"

"Mr. George, you'll pray excuse me. I'm tired, and——"

He burst out :

"Don't *you* be afraid of me, too !"

He was coming closer. If he touched her she knew, with absolute clarity, that her self-control, such of it as was left, would desert her. She would become—she, Elizabeth Bingham, chaperone, governess, and housekeeper to the noble house of Fane—nothing better than a yelling, crazy Bedlamite.

But he paused.

"I see," he said, "they've been talking about me. That's it? Rainsborough escorted Martina—I mean Harriet—to the reception? Oh, well, I understand. But they're wrong, you know. It's not so bad as they think. They're barking up the wrong tree. And you say she fainted?"

She said nothing. She shrank away from him towards the staircase, shielding the light with her hand. She was conscious of her heart beating in great pumping thuds.

"I *must* see her," he declared.

She screamed then, but thrust her hand before her mouth.

"You must go!" she cried.

"Go?"

"I told you so before. You can't stay here—it was always wrong! And now——"

"I shan't pester you much longer," he told her icily.

"You'll go—to-morrow?"

"No. I will not go to-morrow! I shall go when it pleases me. And it will please me to go when we return to Camelos. Not before!"

She drew upon some inexplicable resource of desperate courage.

"And suppose I inform her ladyship to-morrow of these rumours? Do you think you'll ever see Camelos again?"

"I shall see Camelos again."

"You'll be sent packing to-morrow!"

He said, unmistakably threatening :

"If I were you, madam, I wouldn't interfere, or you may regret it! I will leave the Rainsboroughs when I return to Camelos, not before! Is that clear?"

"How dare you use that tone to me!"

He was desperate; he felt not one world, but two, crashing about his head.

"If you say one word to Lady Rainsborough I swear to you that Harriet will suffer! Now do you understand? Now will you keep your mouth shut?"

In his excitement he came closer to her. For a moment she shrank back, then, raising her hand, she made the Sign of the Cross above his head. She was desperate. She began, in a feeble, wavering voice to pray. She was saying the Lord's Prayer. Her voice gathered strength, and grew louder.

He said no more. What was there to say? Replacing the key in his pocket, he flung himself out of the house. All that night he strode furiously along the front. At dawn he found himself near a fisherman's tavern. He went in and drank some porter. Then he fell asleep, his head on his arms. He was an object of immense curiosity to the men in the inn, but at least, knowing nothing of his diabolical powers, they were not afraid of him, and so, as he drifted into a light, uneasy sleep, Lord Barradale was comforted.

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Martina, who had scarcely closed her eyes, refused that morning to ride with Sir John. He would be, as she well knew, disconsolate, for he was returning that day to Oxfordshire, lying the night in London. But she felt unequal to facing him.

William's revelation had come to her as a thunderbolt for a reason unguessed by him. She had never seen Chloe Laval, nor did she in any way connect her with Isabel, whom she had almost forgotten. This vision of George's future meant one thing to her—that, when they returned, as she supposed they must, to his own days, he would be unfaithful to her with another woman, with the re-incarnation of this Miss Laval.

"What's the use," she thought, desolate, "of giving up everything for him?"

She did not believe for a moment that George was in love with the actress; she *did* believe that in the future world he might deceive her for such a woman. Thinking thus, she hated the future more than ever.

She was so melancholy and heavy-eyed that nothing roused her, not even the knowledge that Mrs. Betty was still in bed with the vapours.

"She always has the vapours when I do," she observed crossly to Emily.

"Mr. Taylor was out all night," Emily ghoulishly informed her.

When Lady Rainsborough desired her to drive at noon to Donaldson's Library, she agreed listlessly.

"After last night's hysterics," said Lady Rainsborough, "you must show yourself. That is imperative!"

And so they drove to Donaldson's, which was, in Regency times, as much of a club as it was a library. While they sat down to drink a cup of coffee they were joined by Sir John Russell, and by a friend of his, a Captain Grant, whom Lady Rainsborough would have found intolerable but for his love of play.

Sir John said over the coffee:

"I heard you were ailing last night. I knew, then, that you wouldn't ride this morning. You still look pale; are you better?"

"I'm better."

"You know I return home to-day?"

"Of course I know. You've told me fifty times! I'm sorry I could not ride."

He said, leaning across the table:

"I'm still disconsolate, ma'am! I've had no word from you—I've got no crumb of comfort to send me on my way!"

She shook her head, indicating Lady Rainsborough, who seemed to be deep in conversation with Captain Grant. He looked at them impatiently, and turned again to her.

"You can't give me a word, Harriet? I've been patient, ou know!"

And a shadow fell over his rosy, solid face. He added :

"I gave you a month, Harriet ! There is some time to go !"

She glanced swiftly at Lady Rainsborough and whispered :

"I shall never marry you, John. That I know ! Don't think about it any more—think of some other woman !"

He retorted with obstinacy :

"We've some time to go before I renounce you ! And, Harriet——"

He paused, for she was not listening.

She was staring over his shoulder as though she saw a ghost. He turned, to perceive that she was not looking at a ghost, but at a lady he had once met, a lady named Chloe Laval. He could not, of course, bow to Miss Laval while he was with Lady Rainsborough and her daughter, but Harriet's gaze of fixed dismay perplexed him greatly.

She pulled impatiently at his sleeve.

"Who's that ?"

He was embarrassed, this simple squire. It seemed to him monstrous that Harriet and this woman should have to be beneath the same roof. Once again, thinking of his own house, his pleasant, simple rooms, his old clock, his fragrant garden, his dovecote, and his lily-pond, he hated the modish town in which they found themselves.

Harriet, he thought, looked like the devil ; she was pale, and her green eyes flashed feverishly.

Memory plays strange tricks.

George, who was married to Isabel, had detected no resemblance between his wife and Chloe Laval. Martina, who had seen Isabel twice in her life, was immediately struck by the likeness. She trembled, remembering with a sense of shock the two nights she had spent at Cheyne Walk.

Chloe Laval, glancing furtively at Lady Harriet Fane, passed into an inner room, pursued by several noisy male admirers.

Cheyne Walk. . . Martina, at this thought, felt a sudden dread, and her fear had nothing to do with Isabel Barradale.

"That was Miss Laval?" she asked Sir John, and then it was though an iron weight was lifted off her brain.

"Really, ma'am, it's quite monstrous that you should recognize——"

"Yes or no—was that Miss Laval?"

"Yes!"

To his astonishment she blossomed as he spoke. Her cheeks glowed with vivid colour, and her eyes sparkled. She had looked sick, but now she was herself once more. She laughed, as though she had not a care in the world.

She said:

"One's always afraid of the unknown . . . that's very silly, isn't it?"

He answered grudgingly:

"You look more . . . you look like yourself!"

She burst out laughing.

He bent over the table.

"What will you have to say to me, when you come back to Camelos?"

"Oh, Lord, sir—how should I know?"

How could she, she wondered, have been even for a moment jealous of a woman who was Isabel? If only she had known! Turning wilfully from Sir John's grave scrutiny, she heard Lady Rainsborough say to Captain Grant:

"Chelsea appears to have become a charming village. I have a sister-in-law living in Cheyne Walk, a pretty lane near the river——"

And then, once again, she shivered.

"Are you cold?" Sir John demanded.

"No. Just a ghost walking over my grave!"

CHAPTER XLV

"YOU DON'T SEEM to have been very discreet, do you?" said Martina to George.

They were standing on the beach, where rough pebbles cut the thin kid of her slippers, and she would have winced with pain had she been alone with him. But they were not alone; Francis and Peregrine dragged seaweed from the waves, as was now their daily custom, and a hundred yards behind her stood a wooden-faced but resentful footman.

He retorted:

"It's Rainsborough's fault, from start to finish!"

"What did you make him see in the dining-room at Camelos?"

"Don't ask me! We were both drunk! Believe me, if I hypnotized him I hypnotized him unconsciously!"

She was silent. Not for any price would she have talked to him of Miss Laval's resemblance to Isabel.

She said, instead:

"I suppose you can scarcely wait—to get back to Camelos and to the temple?"

"What do you think?" he replied simply to this, and added: "I never liked this world much. Since they think I'm the devil, I hate it more than I can tell you!"

"You seem very sure," she told him.

"Sure? Of what?"

"Sure I want to go back with you!"

He turned sharply, and it was as though a light had been blown out behind his face. She saw, with discomfort, that his lips were quivering.

"You don't——" he tried to speak, but it seemed as if something choked in his throat.

She could not for long be merciless with him.

"I'll come back," she said.

He asked incredulously :

"Do you *mind*?"

She did not answer for a moment. Instead she looked out at the sea, tumbling, grey as pigeons' feathers, beneath a sky of Indian ink.

"No," she said at last, "I don't mind."

"But you wouldn't mind staying here?"

"Not if it was your home."

"Do you mean you could really endure this life?"

She smiled. She wore a green pelisse, trimmed with fur. She waved her muff as she said :

"They think, Rainsborough thinks, that it's you—us, I mean—who live in hell!"

"I know! They're crazy, aren't they?"

There was a pause. She thought of all that 1812 had given her—her name, security, her success, her lovely dresses, her many admirers, a home, the petting of Mrs. Betty and of Emily, the companionship of her brothers, the shelter of Camelos. A family. Everything that she had longed for, and had never known before.

"What is it?" he asked urgently. "Don't you think they're crazy?"

"Yes," she said, "I suppose they are."

"Does that mean——"

"It means I'll go back with you as soon as we return to Camelos."

"Good," he smiled, well pleased, "I knew you'd want to when it came to the point!"

She said nothing. He glanced at her anxiously.

"That idea of marrying at Gretna Green," he said, "you know, it sounded wonderful. But it wouldn't have been wonderful if we'd done it."

"I suppose not."

"We'd have starved. Or I'd have been shot! And think of the scandal!"

"Yes," she said.

"Especially now. Now that they believe I'm a Satanist ! Thank God I didn't let you in for that !"

"I suppose it was better not."

"Better not ! You must be mad !"

"Yes," she said again.

"Martina, do you know what we'll do directly we get back ?"

"What ?"

"We'll dine at Quaglinos. Then we'll go to the Embassy Club, then we'll go to the Four Hundred. Then we'll go back to the studio. What do you think of that for a celebration ?"

"It will be lovely."

"We'll drive in my car, we'll telephone for a table, and we'll dance to swing music ! If we could taxi in an aeroplane, I'd book one. Anything—anything—to get away from this ! Sometimes I feel I can hardly wait !"

"What for ?"

"To live in modern times, of course !"

She said :

"I've an aunt who lives in Cheyne Walk. Did you know that ?"

"To the devil with your long-buried aunts ! Martina, I wish Isabel and I had arranged our divorce before all this. One would have been nearly free to marry then ! The King's Proctor couldn't cross time !"

It was cold, and she thrust her hands in her muff.

"George, if you saw Isabel now, would you know her ?"

"Don't be silly !"

"But would you know her ?"

He was sarcastic.

"Oh, no ! Of course, I wouldn't recognize my own wife ! Are you crazy ?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Where are we going when we get back ?"

"Anywhere you like. The West Indies, Tahiti, California, Brazil, New York ! Take your choice !"

She asked, frowning :

"Can we never go back to Camelos?"

George hesitated. Vaguely there returned to his mind a scene with an old man—a man he knew must be his father.

"I think we can't," he said. "I'm damned if I can remember why, but I believe we can't—at least not for—for the present."

"The present!"

"You know what I mean. Martina, the boys tell me Sir John returned to the country?"

"That's true," she said, "but Miss Laval stays on, I believe?"

"How silly you are to-day! I shall never see her again! I told you she was one of the many people here who think I'm Satan."

She was conscious of a relief so profound that she sighed with satisfaction.

"We're leaving so soon," she said, "promise you won't see her before we go?"

He laughed.

"I swear I won't," he assured her. "I thought I'd found in her someone I might talk to when you—and Mrs. Betty—were unavailable. But she's too difficult, and, anyhow, Rainsborough's mad about her, as I suppose you know?"

She frowned suddenly.

"What have you done to upset Mrs. Betty? She was your friend. But she's not your friend any longer."

"Oh," he said bitterly, "Mrs. Betty's been talking to Rainsborough. She's an old fool—let's face it! She thinks I'm the devil, too."

She glanced swiftly around her. Francis and Peregrine were screaming with joy as they tugged their great festoons of seaweed from the water. Behind her the footman, her chaperone, stood motionless, impassive, like the Frog Footman from *Alice in Wonderland*.

"Oh, darling," she exclaimed, "I can't kiss you as I'd like to, but *why* is it you've got to infuriate and terrify everyone

we've met—even those people who were once your friends? What do you do, and why is it that they hate you?"

"God knows! You get away with it—I don't! They accept you, Martina, but they cross themselves when they see my face! I can't stand much more of it!"

She said nothing.

Never, she thought, had she loved him more than on that grey and wind-swept afternoon. She knew then that although they had never yet been lovers, he was blood of her blood, bone of her bone. Without him she could not exist. Without her he would be lost.

She dreaded more than anything their return to the twentieth century that she had learned to hate. Yet, with George beside her, she would not hate it, for they would be together, and nothing else mattered. Realizing so much, she sighed again.

"I certainly shan't allow you to flirt any longer with Miss Laval! I've sworn to refuse John Russell, who's no longer here; now promise me again you won't see that woman before we return to Camelos!"

"I've given you my word of honour I won't see her!"

Perhaps her conscience pricked her, but she paid no attention. If he did not recognize Isabel's face, who was she to tell him? People looked so much alike. . . .

"Listen," he said suddenly. "I wish you'd go home and plead my case with Mrs. Betty! She's convinced I'm the fiend—it's all Rainsborough's fault—but she might tell his mother, and, if I wasn't allowed back at Camelos . . . well, I . . . think it out for yourself. . . ."

"Yes," she said, "I'd better see her as soon as possible."

"You'd certainly better."

"You were a fool to frighten her. She was so fond of you."

"For God's sake," he exclaimed irritably, "don't you nag at me, too!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to."

She beckoned to her escort, the dummy footman.

"Why do you take that absurd effigy about with you?" he demanded.

"I have to. He's not much trouble, is he?"

"I don't seem to remember," he retorted, "that you had so efficient a chaperone in Venice?"

"In Venice? No, you're right! I hadn't anyone to look after me there. . . ."

"Martina," he said, "I'm in a vile humour! Will you forgive me?"

She smiled.

"You're arrogant and spoilt," she said. "I can't think why I love you. But I *do* love you, and I always will, if that's any consolation! I can't help it."

CHAPTER XLVI

"YOU MUSTN'T MIND George," she said later to Mrs. Betty, "just because sometimes he's queer."

But Mrs. Betty, sitting up in bed with a pallid face, crowned by a night-cap threaded with blue ribbons, proved unexpectedly obstinate.

"Harriet, when he was what I thought him, already I disapproved of this intimacy. Now that I know—these—these—blood-curdling stories, I cannot endure the thought of your association! Not only that, but Francis and Peregrine! He shan't contaminate them! He shan't return to Camelos!"

"Listen," Martina said, looking at her gravely. "I promise you that you needn't be afraid of him. He won't do me any harm, or the boys, or anyone else. And he won't stay. He'll leave as soon as we return to Camelos. I don't know why you should believe William before you believe me, although I see you do; William had some drunken dream at Camelos, and you all believe in him so much that you flutter about like hens when a fox has got inside the poultry-yard! That's foolish—why can't you realize I know George better than any of you? He's not a devil, and he's not a Satanist; soon, he'll go away, and then you'll all forget he ever came to live with us. . . . you'll forget him very soon."

"You love him," Mrs. Betty declared vehemently, raising herself on her pillows.

"We can't help who we love," Martina said to this, "and when he goes away, everything will be different."

"You'll marry Sir John?"

"I can't make any promises."

"At least you won't marry this tutor?"

"No," Martina agreed, "I won't marry the tutor, because the tutor won't marry me. I've suggested a Gretna elopement, and been refused. That's out of the question now. . . ."

"Harriet! Your pride—your breeding—to offer to this—this dependent——!"

"Don't upset yourself," Martina returned dryly. "I've told you he'll have none of me . . . he dislikes the idea of an elopement—even more than my mother would dislike it!"

"All the same, my duty is to speak——"

"I wouldn't speak, if I were you. I've already told you there's no danger! And we're going back to Camelos next week. All this fuss will be over sooner than you think!"

"She's nervous," Mrs. Betty thought, watching her, "she's frightened, too, although she won't admit it. . . ."

She said, her eyes fixed on Martina's:

"If I consent not to mention this—these disgraceful rumours—to your mama—do you promise me he'll go when we return to Camelos?"

"I promise that he'll go, and you will never see him again."

"I will never see him alone, in any case!"

"That's agreed, too."

"And William? If I don't speak to her ladyship, he'll bite my head off!"

Martina got up and stared restlessly out of the window. A chaise passed, and then a curricie; some post-boys walked down the street, chaffing one another. She would miss them, in the future.

She asked wearily:

"Can't William fight his own battles?"

Mrs. Betty was to some degree restored by the purge she had taken, by her tisane, and by Emily's fussing. Now Harriet reassured her. George Taylor would go, when they returned to Camelos. She sighed, shifting on her pillows. Sometimes she felt lost in the wilderness of this strange new century. As a girl, as a poor relation, she had often helped Lady Rainsborough to dress herself for some grand ball, or Whig reception, at Devonshire House. There had been

pleasant fireside talks then; gossip of the lovely, reckless Duchess, of Lady Bessborough, Harriet's godmother, of Fox and Sheridan, of Mrs. Fitzherbert, of the Prince himself—still Florizel—and of a hundred other brilliant figures. They were nearly all gone now; the candles of Devonshire House burned low; the famous windows no longer twinkled, like a necklace of jewels, across the darkness of Piccadilly. The lights were low, and they had gone, those great days, with the passing of the first Duchess; with the death of its goddess the curtain had fallen upon Devonshire House, upon the greatest stage of the glittering Whigs.

With the birth of a new century everything that had once been subtle and gracious now seemed, to those who wistfully remembered the past, more brilliantly vulgar than a piece of paste, and the stars of a few years ago were ghosts, since Prince Florizel had been acknowledged Regent. Mrs. Betty, a humble admirer of so much glory, sighed as she thought of those splendid, half-forgotten days. Mr. Fox, she was sure, would have known how to banish the fire and brimstone she still sniffed, and Mr. Sheridan—alas! he was so seldom sober now—Mr. Sheridan would at once have dispelled her terrors with some daring and audacious plan. But now . . . now there was no one, and really, when old-fashioned folk talked of these young people as pagans . . . sometimes she began to understand what they meant.

"You spoil William," Harriet was saying, not without jealousy.

"I spoil you all, my dear. And he is the head of the family."

"That doesn't prove him always right. This time he's completely in the wrong. He's made a fool of himself, and must know it, in his heart of hearts."

What a wilful girl she was! And what a heedless creature! But there . . . she had always been the same—always. There was no changing her stubbornness.

"I don't like to hear you speak so disrespectfully of your brother," Mrs. Betty protested mechanically. She was thinking:

'Her mother was always hard on her. And I indulged her too much. She's not altogether to blame. . . .'

Martina repeated coaxingly :

"I promise you George will do no harm while he stays, and I promise he shall go !"

"Harriet, you are not to call that young man by his Christian name !"

"Oh, as you like !"

Martina, too, was thinking. The idea of their return, to her, was horrible ; she, the petted Harriet Fane, would wander once more, shabbily dressed, through the deafening clamour of London traffic ; she would be his mistress, but not his wife, for there was Isabel ; there would be a war, and he would probably be killed ; then she would be left alone, isolated in a time she knew to be hideous. Perhaps, she thought hopefully, the spell would not work, and they would have to stay where they were ; but then he would be miserable, and she could not bear that he should suffer.

'Oh !' she thought in desperation, 'if only he could have endured being poor !'

She felt dejected, almost crushed ; it seemed so cruel that he would not run away with her in this world that she found beautiful. If they had married he could have taken pupils, and painted portraits ; she would have taught languages, and cooked and sewed for him. This was more Martina's dream than Harriet's, she supposed, not without confusion, but it was one that she had held dear in her secret heart, and now, as she knew, it would come to nothing. It was ephemeral as only a dream can be.

Mrs. Betty was speaking.

"And I'll be glad to see Camelos again, after all this shock . . . the gardens are so beautiful in May, and I've sadly missed my herbs . . . and then the boys have so much more to do in the country, and of course they can always go back to the parson when—he goes. . . ."

Martina said nothing.

Would they miss her when she disappeared ? Or would

another girl take her place? What really happened to Harriet Fane?

As though aware of this last reflection, Mrs. Betty said:

"You should marry, my dear, and settle down. You're twenty, don't forget; you've left it late."

Martina shivered.

"I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen. I know less than anyone!"

"If you behave, dear, your mama will take you up to London for June. It needn't be Sir John—there are plenty of others—you always were a honey-pot!"

"There's that story of Vauxhall," Martina answered vaguely, for her thoughts were far away. She would never go to London with Lady Rainsborough. The other girl might; she would have everything, that other girl. Everything but George. Thinking that, she was no longer jealous, for George belonged to Martina Forest.

Miss Laval refused to admit any visitors. She said to her maid:

"There's only one I'll receive. The young man by the name of Taylor. . . ."

But although a number of bucks came to call upon her, the young man by the name of Taylor stayed away, and she sat desolate before her hearth. She would have welcomed Rainsborough, but, according to her page, Rainsborough had left unexpectedly for London.

It was strange, she thought, in the midst of her unhappiness, that William had not called to say good-bye.

Two days later her maid, who was really alarmed by her pallor and low spirits, informed her that Lady Rainsborough, Lady Harriet, and the young gentlemen, had left Brighton for the country. She had had that, she said, from the milkman.

"And the tutor—Mr. Taylor?"

"He left with them," said the maid, who thought by being cruel she was being kind, as indeed may well have been the case.

" Oh. . . . "

She said, after a pause :

" I shall return to London as soon as we can pack. "

" London, miss ? "

" You heard what I said ! "

She could not endure to stay any longer in Brighton.

Whenever she went out, on the Steyne, or along the front, she expected to see that tall, swift figure, cloaked, bright-haired, and mysterious.

What did it matter to her if he were mad ? She loved him, she would always love him. She was sure, too, that she loved him more than his fashionable little slut !

" He will never come back, " she said to herself.

The spring seemed to mock her. Spring was made for love. When she drove abroad, the rolling emerald downs, the may-trees, the cuckoo tolling—all these saddened her, and her heart was frozen. Down at Camelos he was loving Harriet Fane.

She had frightened him away.

She would, with a melancholy perversion, almost have welcomed autumn ; she would have liked the fading days, the falling leaves, the scent of bonfires, chrysanthemums plumed with frost. The decay, the desolation of autumn would exactly have suited her mood.

She grew tired, the day before her return to London, of sitting alone before the hearth. Despite her will, the jollity of spring had influenced her.

She threw open her doors to Fred Lamb and his friends. They were young and careless and cheerful.

She lived near Kew ; she would be there for lilac-time. She would have liked to meet her lover beneath the sweetness of the lilac-bloom, but she never would, nor would he ever be her lover. Those were dreams, foolish dreams ; he was a madman, and she would never see him again.

You can't, she thought, break your heart for a man you've only talked to twice.

She drove to London with three swaggering dandies ; they

laughed and sang, and so did she, so that they were a merry party.

But never, she thought, no matter how long she lived, would she ever forget the young man who went by the name of Taylor.

She was right, for she never forgot him.

CHAPTER XLVII

SPRING, AT CAMELOS, that year of 1812, was an enchantment. Martina had never seen an English spring, and George could not recollect one so exquisite. He had always been at Eton, or at Oxford, or abroad; he had never before seen Camelos in late May.

The vast lawns were so many acres of green velvet, and in the meadows, where the rain-drenched petals of the thorn-hedges had already fallen, the buds of dog-roses, and of wild crab-trees already thrust forth their coral buds. In the gardens, lilac bushes bloomed heavily sweet, and the avenue near the lake was arched over with plumes of white and mauve and purple. Laburnum trees dazzled with their fountains of gold; blossom, pale as moonlight, blanched the orchards with a fragrant snowdrift; chestnut-blossoms starred the trees like Christmas candles of pink and white, and soon the may itself would burst forth flowers of rose and snow and crimson. In the woods the massed bluebells faded into a carpet of silver.

Soon, on the lake, the clotted lily-pads would bud, so that the lake itself would be transformed into a garden of waxen blossom, and the flowers would bloom so thickly as to hide the darkness of the water.

Soon, Martina thought, but not yet; not for her; she would never see the water-lilies; that other girl, the girl she had grown to hate—*she* would see them. Martina would no longer be there.

For two days she saw nothing of George, and this was enough, in itself, to sadden her, for the loveliness of this spring seemed unendurable without his company.

Then, on the third day, Lady Rainsborough drove away to

lie the night with some friends she had known in her youth. She drove away behind the bay horses, and that afternoon, beneath the cedar trees, Martina asked George if he would meet her in the park.

"Yes," said he, "I've been waiting for a chance to see you."

'That,' she thought, 'is my death-warrant. He'll take me away to-night.'

She said :

"It was impossible to talk to you before."

"Darling, I know that ! We'll meet at four, if you can manage it. Where shall we meet ?"

"Do you know the chestnut trees in the park ? The ones behind the lake ?"

"I knew them once. I'll meet you there at four."

Martina's fury when Sir John Russell rode over after lunch was perhaps more fear than fury, for the squire showed a disposition to stay.

She said :

"I can scarcely receive you in my mother's absence !"

He answered gravely, while his horse nozzled for sugar in his hand :

"I supposed Mrs. Betty to constitute an admirable chaperone ?"

"She's busy !"

"Harriet ?"

"Sir ?"

"Will you ride with me this afternoon ?"

"I must beg you to excuse me."

He said—it was foolish of him, but he could no longer control his feelings :

"Taylor's still here, isn't he ?"

"He is."

"I see."

"You see nothing !"

"I had better ride home," he said to this, as the great clock boomed.

She was sorry for him then, and she wondered if, when she was gone, that other girl would treat him better. She said :

"One day you'll meet someone worth fifty of me. And then you'll marry. Marrying me wouldn't make you happy."

"Don't you think I'm the best judge of that?"

She shook her head.

"Harriet," he said warmly, "I heard those Brighton rumours. You have nothing to hide."

"Why, certainly I haven't! What do you mean?"

He got upon his horse and waved the groom away.

"I know," he said, "Taylor is not a Satanist. You would never have stood his friend, had he been that."

"You're too good to me!" she exclaimed, half sardonically, half wistfully.

"Too good? I don't know," and he smiled down at her.

"You're a strange, self-willed girl, Harriet, and yet I've set my heart on you. Don't forget—I gave you a month; there are still some days to go before I give you up!"

He rode away down the drive.

She learned, a few minutes later, from Mrs. Betty that Rainsborough was returning the next morning. He was to stay a week at Camelos.

"Why?"

Mrs. Betty was severe and remote.

"To arrange, once and for all, this question of a marriage between yourself and Sir John Russell."

She protested:

"They might have asked me first!"

"Now, Harriet, pray don't speak in that unbecoming manner! Are you going to help me clean the silver this afternoon?"

"No . . . if you'll excuse me. I need some fresh air! I'm going to take a walk."

Mrs. Betty was frigid.

"Just as you please! You can see, as well as I can, that the sun is shining. In my young day girls protected themselves from freckles and sunburn. However, you've insisted, since

Brighton and before, on having your own wilful way. I wash my hands of you ! ”

“ I shan't be long,” Martina said to this.

Mrs. Betty was silent for a moment. Then she said, avoiding the girl's eyes :

“ When is he going ? ”

“ Oh, soon,” Martina told her, startled, “ very soon. I promise you ! ”

“ You promised before. We're back at Camelos now. To-morrow your marriage is being officially discussed. He must go at once—you must send him away ! ”

Martina hesitated.

You felt like this, she supposed, when you were killed barbarously, slashed with knives into small pieces. Saying good-bye to Camelos in May was almost more than she could with composure endure. But she did not hesitate.

She assured the duenna :

“ He'll go within the next few days.”

“ If he doesn't, I swear I'll speak to her ladyship ! ”

The thought of that vitriolic eighteenth-century tongue elaborating upon the art of black magic as practised by her sons' tutor was more than Martina could contemplate.

“ He shall go ! ” she repeated quickly.

“ I lock my door every night,” Mrs. Betty told her defiantly.

“ Yes, ma'am ? ”

“ And a Crucifix hangs above my bed ! Now be off, if you won't help me, miss, and beware of freckling your skin ! ”

George, that morning, fell out with his pupil, Francis Fane. Francis had always been a thorn in his flesh, for whereas Peregrine worshipped his tutor, Francis, a sulky lad, had never attempted to make friends with the man his elders found so mysterious.

The quarrel, that sunny morning, originated in something so futile that he could never, afterwards, recollect the circumstances of their difference. But Francis was impertinent, and George could scarcely guess his power to harm.

"Very well, Francis," said he, in his best Etonian manner, "you can stay in this afternoon and write those lines I've just explained to you."

"Sir," exclaimed little Peregrine, appalled by this tragedy, "Jem—the keeper's son—is taking us to dig for the badger this afternoon. Didn't you remember?"

"Nobody's interfering with your afternoon, Peregrine," George told him austere.

"But Francis——"

"Francis," George said, "will stay here until he's finished the work I've given him to do. Is that clear?"

"But——"

"Oh, shut up!" George interrupted. Mrs. Betty, until their contretemps at Brighton, had accused him of teaching the boys 'wild, ugly' expressions. He no longer cared. Francis looked straight at him for a moment with clear, hostile eyes, then continued to pursue his task. George thought of his meeting with Martina beneath the chestnut trees. Outside the window a cuckoo called, gaily impertinent. The clock tolled, and he went on his way.

Near the stables fantail pigeons crooned, drowsily, as they tumbled through the air in search of grain. A horse whinnied, and a stable-boy sang, proclaiming aloud his love for Sally. The hay-loft cat dozed, watching the pigeons with half-closed eyes. In the distance near the lake a peacock screamed, threatening rain. A young colt kicked angrily at the door of his loose-box. Pails clanked, and a dog barked sharply.

The park was freckled with young cowslips; he was late, and she waited beneath the chestnut trees. She wore her lilac gauze with the cherry ribbons at her waist. She swung a straw hat on her hand, and her dark locks wreathed her brow like grapes crowning the temples of a young Bacchante. Beneath her feet the chestnut blossom had fallen in a circle, so that it seemed as though she stood posed upon the surface of a huge pink and white sugared cake.

He thought: 'If time could stand still!'

But this, he had discovered, was what time would never do.

CHAPTER XLVIII

"YOU'RE LATE!" SHE exclaimed.

"I couldn't help it. You look as though you're dancing on a Christmas cake!"

"I'm so tired," she declared, "of waiting here. Let's walk towards the village. Do you mind?"

"I should like to."

They fell into step, moving slowly towards the lodge gates.

"I've waited for you so long," he said, suddenly, "that I shall think I'm dreaming—the day I become your lover."

"Perhaps we shall both be dreaming."

"Martina, how much more time are we going to waste?"

"Are we really wasting time now?"

"You know what I mean," he urged.

"Well, as you'll have nothing to do with me now, I suppose you mean us to meet in the temple to-night? That's what you wanted to say, isn't it?"

A boy in a smock came towards them, driving a flock of sheep. He blew, tunelessly, upon a reed whistle. He grinned, touching his forelock to Martina.

George capitulated, gracefully, watching that gesture. No one, in the future, would salute Martina Forest. The shepherd-boy, unknowing, had given her twenty-four hours.

"To-morrow will do beautifully," he said.

"Very well, George."

"Do you hate the thought so much, darling?"

She slid her hand into his.

"Of course I don't hate it! Where do you get such odd ideas?"

"Oh," he said, comforted, "I sometimes think you're fascinated by all this!"

An old woman, bobbing, toothless, opened the lodge gates, and they walked out into the lane beyond.

"Do you, George?" she teased.

"You have loved it, haven't you?"

"How right you are to put it in the past tense!"

"My sweet, we've so much to live for in the future!"

"Yes, I know. Don't let's talk about it any more! Let's go and look for the place where my aunt's awful house will be built one day!"

"Very well," he acquiesced, "it's up here, so far as I remember."

The squat, thatched cottages leaned across the narrow street like rows of overgrown, top-heavy mushrooms, and their tiny gardens were bright with flowers. Yet there was not a soul to be seen; they passed the smithy, and even that was quiet; they passed an orchard, snow-heavy with blossom, and the duck-pond, green with weeds; and the stocks; everything was deserted; they might have been walking through a village of the dead. It was mysterious, and a little frightening; then, as they came towards the cross-roads, they heard, in the distance, like swarming bees, the hum of angry voices.

"Look!" she cried.

The village people were crowded, in a dense, gesticulating mass, upon the green beneath the signpost. There were, as a matter of fact, three villages combined, to make so thick a crowd, and there were smoking horses, that cropped the grass, and men in red coats.

"Is it a fair?" she asked, puzzled.

A strange instinct warned him.

"I don't think so," he said, "you'd better go back to the orchard behind the blacksmith's and wait. I'll see what it is, and I'll come back to fetch you."

Martina did not in the least want to wait in the orchard.

"But, George——"

"Go back when I tell you!"

She glanced at him beneath her lashes, and saw that he was serious. Had she been in better spirits she would probably have defied him, but the one word 'to-morrow' had quenched her vitality, and she obeyed, sulkily.

George strode towards the crowd. When the villagers recognized a 'gentleman' from Camelos, they drew back, mechanically, to let him pass, but the women were too excited to remember their curtsies.

He pushed his way through them, demanding :

"What's all this ? What's happening ?"

A familiar voice answered him.

"Well, Taylor ! Just in time for the fun !"

It was Sir John Russell, lounging upon his great bay horse.

"Those be thief-takers from London !" muttered a young peasant standing near, pointing excitedly to the two men in red coats, who were busy girthing their overheated horses.

George looked past these men, to a figure standing motionless upon the green, very much as a star, limelight pouring on him, will hold, without moving, the centre of the stage. A huge, tall man, in a torn coat and muddy breeches ; a man whose hands were bound behind his back. There was lace at this man's throat, and a jewel to catch the lace ; he wore, with defiance, the battered garments of an older generation, and he stood his ground calmly, his great legs planted apart, big, and swarthy-dark, his light eyes flickering disdainfully, like a cat's eyes, upon the crowd that gaped upon him.

Memory plays strange tricks.

George, who could not remember Isabel's face, recognized Captain Forest immediately, and turned in horror to Russell.

"Why is this man here ? What's he done ?"

Before Russell could reply, a hundred voices burst forth :

"Black Jack ! Black Jack himself ! He be caught after ten years ! Ten years of High Toby ! They caught him on Farthinghoe road this morning !"

George thrust his way through the crowd until he stood facing Black Jack—Sholto Forest—and the man towered above him, dark, saturnine, composed. He was dirty and unshaven ;

the rich lace at his throat was grimy ; his plum coat was faded brown, his silver waistcoat tarnished, and his boots stiff with mud, but the diamond winked on his cravat, bright as the clear light eyes that were turned quizzingly upon this new champion.

" Forest ! "

" Friend of yours, Taylor ? " Sir John demanded, shifting his weight. He lit a pipe, throwing his leg over the saddle.

The man called Black Jack laughed, contemptuously, and spat.

" Never saw the bloody young buck before in all my life ! "

" What are you going to do with this man ? " George repeated, angrily.

Sir John retorted :

" We're taking Master Black Jack over to Warwick Castle. He'll be tried there, and hanged . . . as he richly merits ! "

" And damn your souls as I swing ! " Black Jack retorted, with an evil glance.

" I ask you," George insisted, " what's this man done ? "

Sir John laughed, uncomfortably.

" You've strange friends, Mr. Taylor, sir ! If you've never heard of this fellow they've christened Black Jack, the greatest rogue on the King's Highway, I can only say you must live in the clouds ! Come, you men—we've rested long enough—throw the rascal on his horse—I'll see you as far as Banbury ! "

" Forest . . . " George said again.

But the highwayman took, naturally enough, not the slightest notice, for he had never heard the name before. With the stoical indifference of a Red Indian, he allowed the thief-takers to sling him up upon his horse, which was led by one of them. Headed by Sir John, the little procession rode slowly away towards Banbury, while the villagers raised a half-hearted cheer. George turned and hastened back towards the orchard.

" What have you been doing ? " Martina demanded.

She was sitting, arms clasped about her knees, upon a fallen tree beneath a cloud of cherry-blossom.

He sat down beside her on the log, wiping his face.

"What's the matter, George?"

"I've just seen a man I—a man they're going to hang!"

"Who? What's he done?"

"They said—he's a highwayman!"

She digested this in silence, and then pounced.

"You might have told me. I've never seen a highwayman! I should like——"

He sprang to his feet. He might have been sitting beside a rattlesnake.

"Good heavens! You've lived here so short a time! But you're brutalized! You're utterly brutalized! I can't believe it's you speaking! I can't believe——"

"You saw the highwayman, didn't you? You've got one law for yourself, and another for me!"

"Martina, do you realize—this man—you might have known him once——"

She got up, stretching herself so that all her lilac frills rippled. A few white petals had fallen upon her curling hair.

"Why do you preach at me like this? You never used to. I suppose it's being a tutor . . . well, I don't care very much one way or another about your highwayman, although if you saw him, I don't see why I shouldn't. But you can be so boring. . . ."

He caught her wrist.

"Martina, Russell was gloating over this man! I wish I'd knocked him off his horse!"

Her face whitened, and her eyes narrowed.

"Let go of me! You're always bruising my arms! I'm sick of it! I'm sick of you——"

"Oh, are you?"

He drew her towards him and kissed her violently. They had not been near to one another for many weeks, and they were both trembling when he released her.

"George . . ." her anger was forgotten.

"To-morrow," he said, "we'll be together always . . ."

His hands closed on the sweetness of her breasts; he kissed her eyes, her warm lips, the cherry-petals scattered on her hair.

"We can't," she murmured, "go on much longer like this. . . ."

"We shan't have to . . . after to-morrow."

They were thrown apart, like frightened children, when they heard the villagers returning, roystering, from their jaunt. Afraid of being caught, they ran away together across the meadows towards Camelos.



CHAPTER XLIX

LATER THAT AFTERNOON, while the sun still shone, Martina went out into the garden to feed the white peacocks.

Lady Rainsborough's absence made everyone at Camelos lighter-hearted, lazier, and sweeter-tempered. Even Mrs. Betty forgot her awful fears ; she hummed, as she polished the silver, and nodded her head to the cuckoo's call while she thrust blossom into vases in the Tapestry Room. Peregrine returned, dirty and happy, from his badger-digging, and when Francis was released, absent-mindedly, from his studies, to run, dark with anger, into the fragrance of the garden, there was no one to notice, still less to fear, the fury in his eyes. He disappeared amongst the trees, and was forgotten.

Soon the serenity of the afternoon would slip into a cloudless sunset.

Everywhere the air was sweet with lilac.

Mrs. Betty sat down to set the spinet tinkling, and out in the stables they were watering the horses. Peregrine ran into the still-room for a jam-puff. On the lake swans floated, pearl-white, and in the may trees the blackbirds, who are always busy-bodies, chattered violently. The cuckoo still called clearly ; his voice would not break for another month. Out in the park they had driven the cows home for milking beneath an avenue arched over by the silvery-green plumage of young beech. In the highest branches of these trees the rooks cawed impatiently as they built their clumsy fly-away nests, and beneath the tallest tree the stable-cat sat patiently, licking his chops.

In the ' Rainsborough Arms ' the villagers collected eagerly to discuss the extraordinary adventure of Black Jack's capture.

To think he had been taken at Farthinghoe, near the coaching inn, only a few miles from their own village! Clustering together, they talked all at once of the legends accumulated about the highwayman's name. A great Countess had been his mistress; she had given him all her diamonds in return for a midnight rendezvous spent in her coach! He was a charmer of horses; a young colt, broken by him, and sold, had dashed itself and its rider over a cliff, rather than belong to another master! It was strange, they agreed, that young Mr. Taylor from Camelos should be friendly with such a rogue, but, then, he was friendly—more than friendly, some said—with Lady Harriet, and all the family were strange—always had been.

The villagers were proud, in a dour way, of 'the family' being strange; they would not have had it otherwise.

The great clock boomed at Camelos, and the countryside still basked in amber sunshine.

Martina threw bread to the white peacocks, and George, walking in the woods near the temple, thought with horror of the man they were going to hang, the man who did not even know that one day he would be called Forest, and die in his bed.

They met, eventually, in the violet shadows sprawled beneath the cedar trees. Two peacocks trailed listlessly before her, while she herself sat curled in the dark bloom cast by the cedars upon the lawn. No longer posed upon a sugar-cake of fallen chestnut-blossom, it seemed to him that she had lost the gaiety of the early afternoon, and this did not entirely displease him, since his own mood had become sombre.

She greeted him.

"You look very angry, and very sad . . . almost as moody as the peacocks!"

"I *feel* moody," he declared, flinging himself on the bench beside her.

The peacocks passed before them once again, trailing the silvery waterfall of their tails.

"How greedy they are!" she exclaimed, "and how tiresome! Almost as tiresome as you! Pray, why do you feel moody?"

"I can't help thinking of that wretched man," he said, slowly, "that man they call Black Jack. You know they're going to hang him?"

She whistled, softly, throwing her last piece of bread to the peacocks.

"He robbed for years, didn't he?" she said carelessly, dismissing the highwayman.

"Do you realize you might perhaps have known him, in our own world?"

"What a silly thing to say!"

"It's not so silly—how do you know you didn't?"

The peacocks, bolder, hovered nearer.

"I wish I had some more bread," she said. "How do you know you never met Miss Laval in *your* own world?"

He frowned at the mention of this name.

"How exactly like a woman!" he declared. "I saw the girl three times! I never even said good-bye to her when we left Brighton!"

"That doesn't mean you'll never meet her again! You liked her; you became friends with her!"

"And, when you scolded, I stopped seeing her!"

"That's no reason," she argued, "for *you* to scold me because I don't pity your robber!"

"You've never seen this man. Yet——"

"You wouldn't let me see him!"

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, losing his temper, "how spoilt Harriet Fane became! You were never like this, once; you were gay and good-tempered and ready to please!"

"You mean I was your slave! You can't bear anyone to stand up to you!"

Once again, after the sweetness of their kisses beneath the cherry trees, they were enemies, hostile and separated.

"Do you know," he said, carefully, still thinking of his friend who was about to be hanged, "do you know, I'm coming to the conclusion that it might be better for you to stay on here when I go back to-morrow. . . ."

"That's strange," she declared, her heart sinking, "I've been thinking the same all to-day!"

"You see, darling, you're so happy here!"

"I'm glad you realize that at last!"

"You've got so much you've never had before."

"A home, a family, a background!"

"Did you miss all that before, Martina?"

"I never had it to miss."

"Well, I miss it," he declared obstinately.

"I know. You can't bear not being Lord Barradale!"

"Will you ever be able to bear not being Harriet Fane?"

"I think I've got more endurance than you. If I had to, I could bear anything!"

"Quite the little heroine! Well, we'd better separate. I'll go back, and . . . wait for you."

"What do you mean," she demanded, "wait for me?"

There was a pause, while he tried to express what was in his mind.

"I don't believe," he said, "that these two miserable tastes of life are all we're going to get! You are unhappy in my time, *I'm* unhappy in yours. Perhaps we'll get a third chance, if we're patient. Perhaps one day we'll be happy together. If so it'd be worth separating. If we only knew!"

Her face softened.

"Do you really believe that?"

"Believe? That's a word I'm chary of using—I don't know what to believe! It seems to me that we may have come together in some form of fourth dimension—to make part of some experiment—to which neither one of us belongs. You sincerely believe that you belong here, while *I* know that I belong to the twentieth century! That's why I'm sure, for instance, you could never return without me! We may both be wrong; this present of yours, this future of mine, may be no more than the dreams of damned and weary souls! Do you know anything about reincarnation, Martina?"

"No . . . nothing."

"No more do I. I wish I did! But I thought—it occurred

to me, oddly enough, when I saw this man they're going to hang—I thought we might once have been swept, loving one another, into some infinity too vast for us to comprehend. So vast that the little lives we live, in which we sometimes meet, are no more, compared to what's been, what's going to be, than a puff of smoke. Perhaps, once or twice, in all infinity, we're allowed to be together for a moment—to know each other's face before we crumble into dust once more!"

"But," she asked, "you talk as though we're only allowed to meet, and pass, and disappear. . . ."

The shadows blackened the lawn beneath the cedar trees. The peacocks had gone away and the sun was sinking.

"I think," he said, uncomfortably, "that's what I do mean."

"But, George, people couldn't be punished so terribly! Punished for what?"

"How should I know? Do any of us know the evil we've done, or are going to do?"

She felt extraordinarily agitated.

"Oh, no!" she cried, "you're wrong! You're blind! You see, this—all this—really happened!"

"Other things have happened to us, too."

"It was my fault! I put this idea of the future into your head! I read that wicked book to you in the library on my birthday!"

"And I took you to the temple, here, when we were going to run away together . . . we're equally to blame!"

"That never happened!"

He said nothing.

Now that the spring day was nearly over, dusk came flowing softly into the garden. The dusk, that was lilac-tinted, brought with it a wave of sweetness from the blossom beyond the cedar-trees—a sweetness neither one would ever forget.

"*This* isn't dreaming!" she told him, "this is real—this scent of lilac! You can't imagine that."

"So real," he agreed, their quarrel forgotten, "that probably neither one of us will ever again smell lilac without thinking

of this moment. But that doesn't alter what I was saying, and we may have said all this before—hundreds of years ago! For all I know, or understand, we may have talked like this since time began."

She sighed, drawing her shawl about her.

"What's that?" she asked, starting.

"What?"

"Something scrabbling up the trees. It sounded like a cat."

"I can't hear anything. We'll never quarrel again, will we? Whether I'm right or wrong—it isn't worth it!"

"Just so long," she agreed, "as you won't ever again talk about leaving me, when you go to-morrow!"

"I thought you'd be happier!"

"Oh, George . . ."

Her light dress glimmered in the twilight like the wings of a moth.

"You really want to come away with me?"

"Don't you know," she told him in her soft voice, "that I could never let you go back alone? I shan't leave you; I'll be with you for ever."

"You remember everything will be different, don't you? You won't be Harriet Fane, and there'll be nothing like this. You'll be obscure, and poor, and we won't be married for a long time. No Camelos, no Mrs. Betty, no horses, or dresses, or maids!"

"I've not forgotten."

"I wish," he said, "my character was as strong as yours, but it's not, and never will be. If only I had the courage to stay here with you!"

"Oh," she sighed, "you hate it so much. . . ."

"How you must despise me!"

"No, darling," and she touched his cheek caressingly, "it's worse for you than it ever was for me. I had no roots, before; I was used to having none. I've had them, now, so short a time—I'll go now, if you'd rather."

He shook his head, kissing the palm of her hand. He did not

remind her that now she was striving to identify herself with the twentieth century.

"No. You must have your few more hours at Camelos. Rainsborough returns to-morrow, doesn't he?"

"I hate good-byes!"

"There will be none to say. To-morrow, at midnight, we'll be gone. You're shivering—you must go in!"

"Then," she said, "you agree, in spite of all you've said to-night, that we shall be together for ever?"

"For ever? That's another word I don't begin to understand. But there you are—I don't know—we can only try never again to be parted."

They started, as above their heads a branch crackled sharply.

"I wish," he said, "I had a stone to chuck at those cats! Come in, sweet, before you catch cold!"

.

Five minutes later Francis slid down the trunk of the tallest cedar. Noiseless as an Indian, he ran across the lawn towards the row of lighted windows glowing in the distance.

Through the still-room he ran, scattering the cat, her kittens, and pots of jam; almost knocking the fat housekeeper off her rocking-chair.

"Drat the boy!" she cried, swaying frantically.

But Francis paid no attention. He was already in the passage, ignorant of the damage he had done.

"Drat the boy!" she said again, as the candles winked fitfully, and she clutched at her heart.

"Mrs. Betty!" Francis shouted in the distance, "Mrs. Betty! Mrs. Betty!"

●

CHAPTER L

WHEN MARTINA WOKE the next morning she found it difficult to believe that she had slept for the last time as Harriet Fane. For a moment she lay still, her face pillowed in her arm, while the sweetness of the morning reminded her of that day, little more than a month ago, when she had first awoken in the old-fashioned bedroom to find early daffodils beside her bed. The daffodils were over, now, and spring would soon melt into summer, and she would have gone away for ever from Camelos.

She lay, half dreaming, half wakeful, coral-flushed against the snowdrift of her pillows, wondering where she would sleep that night, and where, the next day, he would take her. She thought that the violence of their transition to the twentieth century might have been less bewildering, had they been permitted to live on together in the modern Camelos. But that would never be allowed; there was Isabel to be considered, and there was George's father; they would be forced to travel, to live rather as once upon a time she had lived with her father, whom she could not, nowadays, remember with any degree of clarity.

But she thought that she remembered an endless vista of cheap foreign hotels and gimcrack villas, oven-hot in summer, icy-cold in winter; there were half-forgotten vignettes of frowzy, screaming landladies, squabbling children, croupiers off duty, unshaven, wolfing spaghetti; garbage floating on the surface of dead-end Venetian canals; palm trees writhing in February gales, or even more incongruously crowned with blobs of snow like sugar-icing. She turned restlessly, as though to shut away her own melancholy fancies. Life with George

could never degenerate into a string of evil memories, like these memories; to be with him would console her for all that she must lose; without him, life, even the life of Harriet Fane, would drag along, shadowed, twilit, for ever cloistered from the sun. Nor, in the future, would she be subjected to that existence of squalor she remembered dimly, as one remembers a nightmare dreamed long ago. His idea of poverty was not hers; they would be richer, on his mother's small allowance, than she had ever been.

Another thought occurred to her, a bitter one, this, and one that she quickly stifled.

"If only he'd offered to stay! I'd never have let him! But he might have offered!"

Perhaps, after all, his character was stronger than hers, for he had suggested no compromise. Faced with the alternatives of remaining behind, or of returning to his own life, he would return. He was ruthless even in his love for her. If they were to be for ever separated she believed that she would die, but *he* would not die—not he! He would survive. Yet he loved her passionately; he was imaginative and sensitive and he seemed to depend upon her. She was suddenly acutely conscious of the vast, intricate differences of character existing between men and women, and she knew that always, even with George, there would be something she would never understand.

What had he meant, for instance, by this strange talk of a 'fourth dimension,' of his conviction that they might meet and pass and lose one another not once, but many times? Whether this vague talk of his was based on doctrines he had read, or had remembered, she did not know, but she did know that their journey across time, embarked upon so light-heartedly, as if by children playing at a fairy-tale, was something more important now, more frightening. No human brain could conceive of the æons of time spinning through space to form the word 'eternity.' Such mysteries lay beyond the comprehension of intellect; somewhere there must be a beginning, and an end; but it was not for mortal man to try to tamper with infinity, and she thought, uncomfortably, of

the two who had tried in their childish ignorance, to interfere for an infinitesimal moment with the awful forces of time.

What had they done ?

Why was it that she could sometimes remember scraps of Harriet's childhood while George was always Barradale ? Why, when they had wished for freedom had he rejected that freedom when at last it came ? Had he really taken her to Vauxhall ? Or had she met him first in Venice ? Worst of all, supposing that when they airily returned to the temple the powers that they had so recklessly unleashed refused to operate, so that the future rejected them ? For her own sake she would be thankful. But for his——

Emily's voice sounded sharply in her ear.

"Your la'ship must hurry ! You've no time to lose !"

"Why, what's the matter ?" she demanded, sitting up in bed, struck by the urgency of Emily's tone.

"Matter ? Don't you ask me what's the matter because I don't know, and that's the truth ! Were you up to some mischief, yesterday, with her la'ship away ?"

"No ! Do stop chattering and answer when I bid you ! Why should I get up ? Is the house on fire ?"

"Her la'ship," Emily answered grimly, "wishes to see you in twenty minutes' time in the morning-room . . . the tutor's with her now, and so is Mrs. Betty."

"Well's that nothing to do with me ! I suppose the boys——"

"If you really know nothing they must all be queer-struck, that's all I've got to say ! Her la'ship's in a rare to-do, and Mrs. Betty's crying, and the chaise is ordered, and Master Francis looking like the cat that stole the cream, and——"

This was more serious than she had supposed.

"Who's the chaise ordered for ?"

"That I can't say, but all I know is Henry said something about waiting to know whether he should pack for the tutor, so, you see, you must have been up to some mischief, for all your innocent looks !"

"I haven't ! Emily, please hurry—*can't* you hurry !"

.

George stood facing Lady Rainsborough in the little white-panelled morning-room with its draped crimson curtains. He had not been asked to sit down.

Lady Rainsborough, in her morning-dress, was distinctly formidable. She wore a straight robe of dark blue, silver-striped; her hair, as yet undressed, was hidden beneath a cap of exquisite lace. Her long jewelled hands, resting on her lap, occasionally twisted themselves in a spasm, and when he looked closer, as he did, abstractedly, he saw that she was tearing her handkerchief into fierce shreds. He looked quickly away.

Mrs. Betty sat beneath the window in a collapsed heap of girlish muslins. Her eyes, which she mopped frequently, were swollen. George noticed other things about the room; there was a pet starling in a cage; lilac, thrust carelessly in a vase on the writing-table, reminded him vividly of his last talk with Martina; the clock was Chinese; there was a picture he could have sworn was a Stubbs, and the chairs were Chippendale. But none of these observations served to divert him, for Francis Fane had just left the room, and his damning evidence hung like a dark cloud in the air.

"Francis had been punished," George stated, after a pause.

"So you have already said. Do you accuse the boy of lying?"

"Not consciously. He overheard a conversation he misunderstood. If I may say so, he should be punished again, for eavesdropping!"

"You may not say so! I have no wish to hear your opinions. I merely require an answer to my question—did you or did you not obtain a promise from Lady Harriet to run away to-night at midnight?"

"No! In the sense you mean, I did not."

"Would you be good enough to repeat, before Mrs. Betty and myself, your own version of your conversation with my daughter?"

George was growing angry.

"Madam, I see no reason for repeating a private conversation! You've heard what Francis ran to tell Mrs. Betty; you've heard what he said just now, and you've heard my own denial. What more is there to say?"

"Only a few words, I agree," Lady Rainsborough told him with a sweetness more dangerous than the purring of a tigress, "only a few words more, but they should suffice, before you are dismissed from Camelos . . . although I retained you, sir, from motives of charity, and under strict orders never again to molest my daughter, you would appear, from what I have heard, immediately to have disobeyed me."

"Lady Harriet——"

"Be silent, sir! I have just now heard, that even in Brighton, when my back was turned——"

"Madam," George interrupted, white-lipped, "may we not discuss this matter without either one of us becoming abusive?"

"We may not!" the lady silenced him, "since the question of my being abusive to you, Mr. Taylor, does not, and never could arise. Be kind enough not to interrupt me! I was saying, that, from the rumours which have since reached my ears, I learn that while—despite your promises—you were intriguing in Brighton with Lady Harriet, this infamy did not suffice you; you were chasing after a play-actress, and, worst of all, you were posing all over the town as a self-confessed Satanist!"

"That story——"

"Requires no comment! It should explain your dismissal without involving once again my daughter's name! I require you, Mr. Taylor, to leave this house before his lordship posts from London; I have my own reasons for sparing you a thrashing; there must be no further scandal!"

George just succeeded in controlling his temper.

"Lord Rainsborough, madam, is, if I may say so, scarcely likely to thrash me! That I assure you!"

She ignored him. She picked up a netted purse and flung it on the table between them.

"Here is your coach fare to Devon, and a month's wages. A chaise will take you to the Banbury coach-stop. There is nothing left to say."

"I disagree," said he to that, "there is quite a lot to say. Before I leave this house I insist upon seeing Harriet!"

Her scorn was devastating.

"You 'insist,' Mr. Taylor, sir! Those words, on your lips, are grotesquely out of place!"

"All the same, I must see her."

"Shall I pull the bell, madam?" Mrs. Betty demanded, in a small, quavering voice.

"No! Be silent!" and, to George, "you will never see my daughter again. Never! Now you may go—the sooner the better!"

"Lady Rainsborough," George said softly, "someone, long ago, should have taught you better manners. . . . I can only wish the opportunity had been mine!"

Mrs. Betty shuddered at this blasphemy.

"However," he continued, "I'm ready to part friends if you allow me five minutes alone with—with Harriet!"

Lady Rainsborough rose to her feet. She was not afraid, neither of his wild manners nor of his evil reputation. Neither God nor man had ever frightened her, not once in all her cold and greedy life. She faced him dauntlessly, her eyes blazing with a fury equal to his own.

"Do you want my grooms to throw you outside the gates?"

He knew that he was beaten.

"You'll regret this!" he told her.

"I think not," said Lady Rainsborough, a smile flickering over her lips.

He played his last card.

"It means nothing whatever to you that I'm supposed to be a Satanist?"

"Nothing whatever!"

"Yet I can tell the future, and I'll tell you, if you part us in this way, you're signing Harriet's death-warrant!"

"I despise melodrama!"

"So do I," he agreed, "and there's no need for it, really, is there? I think we understand one another quite well . . . unless you let me speak to Harriet, you'll regret it all your life! What difference can it make to you, if I say good-bye to her for five minutes? Five minutes, snatched from eternity! That won't matter much, later on to-day, will it?"

Lady Rainsborough repeated:

"You'll never see my daughter again . . . the chaise is waiting, and one of the footmen has had orders to pack for you. I've given you your wages. Now will you be kind enough to leave?"

He put on his cape. There was nothing to keep him, but his brain worked fast. He had five guineas in his purse, for he had been paid, in Brighton.

"Thank you, Lady Rainsborough," he said, "but you can keep your money. I don't need it—give it to the poor!"

"I've told you—it's your fare to Devon!"

"Really? But I must now break the news to you that I'm not going anywhere near Devon!"

Her eyes smouldered.

"You'd better not be found near here to-night!"

He laughed, buckling his cape.

"I shan't be found, madam!" and then he demanded: "Do you still refuse me an interview with Lady Harriet?"

"If you don't leave immediately, I shall pull the bell-rope!"

"Yes," he shrugged, "I'm sure you will . . ." he faced her across the table, and, since he had nothing to lose, he said:

"When you're dead and gone, Lady Rainsborough, I shall own this house, you know . . . from my point of view you've been dead more than a hundred years, but I could scarcely expect you to understand that! In any case, I hope you have no family vault near here, or, if you have, I'd advise you to be buried far away! You see, one day, in view of our conversation, I might hate you enough to desecrate your grave . . . that's what I feel about you! In any case, I could scarcely lay flowers on it, could I?"

"Pull the bell," Lady Rainsborough told Mrs. Betty, dryly.

"Don't trouble," he said, "I'm going—I can find my own way out!"

"You refuse your wages?" Lady Rainsborough demanded, coldly.

He laughed.

"What's so enchanting about you, madam, is the charm and delicacy with which you express yourself! Yes—I refuse my wages!"

Mrs. Betty moaned, faintly.

On the threshold, he turned towards her. He had forgotten her presence.

"As for you, ma'am, you're a silly, powdered ninny! A toady in muslin petticoats! God help Harriet should she ever lend an ear to *your* counsels!"

He slammed the door and was gone. A few moments afterwards they heard the chaise clattering away down the drive.

Mrs. Betty sat up, almost perky, after so much despair. Satan had fled! Camelos was home once more. She glanced eagerly at her patroness. But Lady Rainsborough brooded; her eyes glowed, and she was motionless, but for the fidgiting of her long fingers, that had torn her fine lawn handkerchief into ragged fragments, although she would possibly have been surprised to know her own destructiveness.

But she stood silent and erect, while, in the morning-room, the starlings twittered at the French windows, the Chinese clock ticked, and outside, on the terraces, peacocks screamed.

That young man! What a fool she had been to saddle herself with Mrs. Betty as witness! Still gazing at the door, the scent of lilac filling all the room, Lady Rainsborough knew that she could not blame Harriet for having so foolishly bestowed her affections on the tutor. At Harriet's age—but at Harriet's age she had been married, so that nothing, of that nature, had been of any particular importance. . . .

She was certain, then, with a primitive flash of jealousy, that Harriet had no right—no right whatever—to the young man! If only Harriet were married to John Russell! Some-

how Russell, eligible as he was, had never once caused Harriet's mother to contemplate, as she contemplated now, with desolation, the horrors of old age. . . .

Old age! She thought of it once more, and she thought, savagely, of Harriet's springing curls, of her green eyes, of her red, full-lipped, lovely mouth. For a moment she hated Harriet; she stood there looking cold enough to Mrs. Betty, then, but beneath that icy exterior a fire fed; if only, if only she were young! Young! Youth itself meant nothing; if only she were just a little younger; if only Harriet were thirteen!

That insolent young man! Closing her eyes, she saw him clearly, just as though he were still facing her, defiant, erect; she visualized the strong bone modelling his face, his tilted eyes, his mocking mouth. . . .

As she mused, and as Mrs. Betty watched her, not without apprehension, a powdered footman insinuated himself across the door of the morning-room.

"My lady! His lordship's curricle's just passing the lodge gate!"

"Oh . . ." she woke, slowly, unfreezing by degrees, but her eyes were glittering ice.

"Tell his lordship when he arrives, that I'm unable to receive him before midday . . . has the chaise gone, with Mr. Taylor?"

"Yes, your la'ship! Nearly ten minutes ago."

"Then tell Lady Harriet I wish to see her here, immediately! Bid her make haste."

Mrs. Betty began to weep.

"All this is terrible—terrible! May I go, madam?"

"Yes, go," said Lady Rainsborough.

She had discovered that she would rather see Harriet alone.

CHAPTER LI

"SO YOU PLANNED an elopement to-night?" Lady Rainsborough suggested.

"No, madam. There's some misunderstanding. Some weeks ago I was imprudent enough to ask Mr. Taylor if he'd elope with me. He refused. That was the end of the matter. He's behaved honourably in this."

"How dare you say that to me?"

"You're my mother."

For a moment they looked at one another in silence. There was nothing beautiful, but much that was bad, in this exchange of candid glances.

Lady Rainsborough said:

"Your engagement to Sir John will be announced to-morrow!"

Martina considered. What did it matter? Then she thought that the other girl, the girl she had created, for aught she knew, should not have everything made too easy, and her eyes flashed.

"No," she said, "if you'll forgive my contradicting you, madam, I shall never marry him! I've wanted to tell you this decision of mine since before we went to Brighton."

Lady Rainsborough's face was white and coldly sculptured, but her lips twitched. If she thought of debts—her own and Rainsborough's—she did not mention them. As for the tutor's smile, she shut it from her mind—it had disturbed her far too much. She said instead:

"I want no nonsense! You'll marry Russell."

"I will not marry Russell!"

"You'll do as you're told!"

"You can't force me to marry him, madam. And I'll never take him of my free will."

Lady Rainsborough smiled.

"Still love-sick for the tutor?"

Martina said nothing.

"Because, my child, he's gone! . . . you'll never see him again. He's gone for ever!"

"Gone?"

"Yes. He's been packed away to Devon, for his insolence. . . . William arrives to-day, and Sir John dines here to-night. Your engagement will be announced to-morrow!"

"When did George go?"

"I can only guess, when you refer to 'George,' that you're speaking of your brother's tutor! You will never see him again. You are going to marry Sir John."

She looked, then, commandingly upon her daughter. She could scarcely believe that Harriet was her own child. Lady Rainsborough was fond of the little boys, and she was proud of William, because he was her heir. But she had never wanted a daughter. She had had five children, and she would have liked five sons. Harriet was something incomprehensible to her mother. She was a stranger, an intruder, and, it would seem, a changeling.

Yet this unwanted girl had captured the affections of the most handsome man she had ever seen! Probably, owing to Mrs. Betty's negligence, the girl had been his mistress. Sir John Russell's feelings meant less than nothing to her, but her own jealousy of Harriet's charm forced her into a cruelty she would regret for ever after.

She said, her mind working swiftly:

"You really refuse announcing your engagement to-morrow?"

Martina had ceased to think about the girl she supposed would take her place. She was thinking of George, wondering how she would ever find him.

She threw up her head and retorted:

"I'll never marry Sir John. And if you've sent Mr. Taylor

away without telling me, you've done something worse than you know! Where is he now?"

Indeed, thought Lady Rainsborough, grimly, the days of Devonshire House were over and done with! Lady Bessborough, she supposed, still continued to spoil her wilful daughter, but for her own part she was no longer prepared to tolerate these girls of the nineteenth century. This chit of hers! She hated Harriet, then.

"You really mean that?" she said, drawing her words, her grey eyes glacial.

Yes, Harriet really meant it. She began, furthermore, to ask, shamelessly, further details of the tutor's departure. Lady Rainsborough watched her coldly. She continued to hate Harriet.

She said:

"My dear child, you're under age, and this interview's becoming tedious. Will you, once and for all, consent to announce your engagement to Sir John?"

"No," Martina said, "I will never marry him. I've told you so."

"Very well," Lady Rainsborough smiled, "if you continue to behave as a naughty child, then you'll be treated as one."

"What do you mean?"

Lady Rainsborough smiled again. She was enjoying herself.

"You will go to your own room, now, and remain there under lock and key. To-morrow Mrs. Betty will chaperone you on the coach to London, but you won't really go to London. You will travel to Chelsea, where you'll stay at Cheyne Walk, with your Aunt Dorothea, until you come to your senses."

"Cheyne Walk?"

"You heard what I said."

Then a queer thing happened—Martina would never afterwards understand it. A strange voice burst painfully out of her throat, a hoarse, ugly voice that bore no relation whatever to her own soft tones, or to her sentiments. The voice did not belong to her; but it shouted, harsh and violent:

"Don't you send me to Cheyne Walk ! If you do, I'll die there ! Do you hear ? I'll die, at Cheyne Walk !"

There was a pause.

"Really, Harriet . . . !" Lady Rainsborough spoke disdainfully. She picked up a fan.

There was a pause, but that strange cry still rang in the air.

"I beg your pardon," Martina said, "I don't know—I can't explain——"

"Will you, or will you not, for the last time, engage to marry John Russell ?"

"No," and this was her own voice. "For the last time, I'll *never* marry him !"

"Then you'll spend to-day locked in your room, and to-morrow you'll go to Chelsea."

"Has George really gone ?"

"Nor will you, ever again, mention that young man's name."

"Where is he ?"

"Harriet !"

Lady Rainsborough pulled the bell, watching the girl with a hostility she could no longer conceal. The tutor ! If he had played his cards well he need never have left Camelos, but he was a fool, and he had chosen to fall in love with Harriet. With Harriet ! She looked, once again, at her daughter. Fox had often encountered Harriet when she was a baby, and so had Sheridan ; they had chucked her beneath the chin ; they had fed her with sweetmeats. What a mercy, Lady Rainsborough thought dispassionately, watching her daughter, that they had never known Harriet as a woman ! For Harriet was devastating.

What power had she—and she had some power—that beckoned men and drew them flame-like towards her ? Her mother, watching her jealously, thought of the nurse's words ; Harriet was a changeling.

"Send me Mrs. Betty," she commanded, "and Emily . . ." her cold eyes never left her daughter.

The girl was not even beautiful !

"You can't lock me up," Martina protested, "you can't do that when you've sent him away! He'll come back—he must—I've got to see him!"

"You'll never see him again," said Lady Rainsborough. She loved these words; speaking them she savoured a strange pleasure.

Her orders, to Mrs. Betty and to Emily, were explicit.

"Lady Harriet's to be locked in her room until to-morrow. To-morrow she'll go to Chelsea for an indefinite visit . . . tell Henry to bespeak two inside places on the Banbury coach!"

Martina, on the point of arrest, still continued to fight Lady Rainsborough.

"I hear, madam, my brother's arrived! May I at least see him, before I'm shut away?"

"You may not," said Lady Rainsborough to this, "you have naught to say to him, nor he to you." She added: "You've already corrupted your younger brothers."

"May I, for a moment, speak to Peregrine?"

"You may not! You're not fit company for any child!"

Martina faced her, her eyes flaring emerald.

"I meant what I've said! I'll never marry Russell!"

"We'll see what you have to say about that after three months' meditation in Chelsea! Mrs. Betty—the key of Lady Harriet's room!"

Martina turned to the duenna.

"Please tell me—has George really gone away?"

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Betty murmured, "he's gone away for ever. . . ."

Whereupon she was locked, ceremoniously, in her room.

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George, at Banbury, soon escaped from the chaise. He wandered all day about the town, drank a glass of ale at a tavern, and then slipped away, taking with him some bread and cheese. He had nearly seven miles to tramp across the fields before regaining Camelos. He did not start before the evening. There was a moon, and the night was

silver-bright. The coach left, clattering on its way like a fiery dragon. He watched it and then turned back across the fields. He clutched the book of spells beneath his arm, and set off, watching the stars.

His faith in Martina was great ; it never once occurred to him that she might not be waiting in the temple.

CHAPTER LII

MARTINA SAT QUIETLY at her window and refused even to talk to Emily when the maid brought in her lunch of broth and bread. The click of the key in her door did not disturb her, for she knew that she could, later in the day, escape easily enough from her window. A leaden roof ran below it, connecting with an accommodating drain-pipe. Her imprisonment did not worry her.

She was troubled, however, by a host of vague and curious circumstances. She wondered, for instance, what she had done to incur so much hostility from Lady Rainsborough; she found this same hostility exceedingly distasteful. She would have liked, too, to speak to Rainsborough; to tell him she was not so black as she had been painted. She knew that he would not dare to come to her against his mother's wishes; like many men he was brave enough in duels or battles, or hunting, but there his courage ended. She would have liked, being human, to have boxed Francis' ears, and to have kissed Peregrine good-bye, but she would never see them again; being haughty, in her disgrace, she despised both Mrs. Betty and Emily, for their subservience to Lady Rainsborough, and, so far as she was concerned, her friendship for both was over and done with.

George's plight troubled her, but not unduly; she knew that he would find his way to the temple long before midnight.

She gave a brief, regretful thought to John Russell, with all his sincerity, his hunters, his spaniels, and his pleasant manor-house overlooking Fair Rosamund's Bower. Perhaps the other girl—if she really existed—would marry him, and bear him children, and, despairing of his dullness, take lovers as her mother had taken them before her. Or perhaps she, too, would

refuse him. Then, she supposed, confused, the other girl would find herself with Aunt Dorothea at Cheyne Walk. Or was there no such person as that other girl? Would Harriet simply vanish from the earth?

Cheyne Walk!

She knew, with an alarming flash of what she thought of as supernatural knowledge, that Aunt Dorothea's house would one day, many years ahead, belong to the Barradales. She herself had stayed there, or would stay there—the trouble with her was that she could not differentiate between what she thought of, dogmatically, as the present and the future. But, when she had ceased to be Harriet Fane, Harriet would stay in that same house. Even in the twentieth century, some of Harriet's vivid personality would linger behind so that George would hate the house, and Martina, sleeping there, would herself experience intense discomfort.

"*I was Martina*," she said aloud, the better to convince herself, "I slept there, and I was miserable . . . it was his house, and he hated it. . . . Harriet must have been unhappy, there . . ."

The other girl! For the first time Martina pitied her; she, too, might have suffered, beneath all the glamour of her careless youthfulness; she might have loved someone, some ghost called George, who had never, in her time, existed; but she might have lost her heart to this imaginary lover; might, perhaps, have created him with inventive wits sharpened by loneliness; she, too, would then have refused Sir John, and for her, too, would loom the exile of Cheyne Walk. Harriet, as Martina saw her, would be imprisoned for love of a ghost; Harriet would be disconsolate, then, for someone who had not yet been born, but she could not know that, and some of her desolation would cloud forever the house in Cheyne Walk where one day the Barradales would live as man and wife.

Martina knew so well that this house was the one belonging to Aunt Dorothea. Had she not spent two nights there? Now she was certain that some of Harriet's spirit lingered in Cheyne Walk, sighing in vain for the lover she had created long ago

from dreams, that lover who, many years after her own death, would take on flesh and blood to exist, in the same house, as husband of another woman.

Poor Harriet !

'Harriet must hate me,' she thought, and then, as though the words were forced from her : 'She can't. Harriet and I are the same.'

But she was a simple creature ; warm-blooded, moved only by her own passions and impulses. She could not comprehend, she never would, George's talk of time and space ; not without perplexity, she could see only two ignorant creatures who had tried foolishly enough to harness for their own ends the forces of something incomprehensible.

She could not, any longer, thrash her brains with these grave problems ; she was Martina, and he was Barradale ; she was Harriet, and he was George. If they possessed, or were possessed, by dual personalities, of the past, of the present, or of the future, she could not pretend to understand. They had played an evil trick, and had been punished ; but they loved one another, and she was sure that when they found themselves in the temple, everything would come right once more.

Everything ! She put her hands over her ears as though she would for a moment, or for a century, shut out a sigh that seemed to come close to her ear, a sigh from Harriet Fane.

But how could Harriet sigh, at her side ? They were the same. . . .

She put her head out of the window, and looked into the garden, drinking her last of Camelos.

The heavy-laden lilac, white, purple, and crimson ; laburnum trees glowing like smouldering fires in the sunlight ; the chestnut-candles still gay, despite so much fallen blossom ; a silvery-green cloud of beech-leaves ; may already blanching the countryside beyond the beeches. In the park cattle grazed, wrenching the young and tender grass ; unsteady lambs bleated, searching for the calm ewes cropping the turf. Nothing was missing ; the cuckoo called, impudent as spring

itself, from the dark boughs of the cedars beneath which she had last talked to George. The sun, setting at last, poured fiery gold into the waters of the lake, flushing the lily-buds, that soon would cast a white carpet over the darkness of the water.

She longed, then, looking on so much that she loved, for the ordeal of her transition to be over. Waiting, as she was waiting now, fretted her nerves, so that the steadfastness of her resolution seemed to her less noble, more selfish, than it had appeared the evening before, beneath the cedar trees; perhaps true grandeur would have lain in setting him free to make what life he could with Isabel.

But that she could not do. Not so much, perhaps, from selfish motives, as from the knowledge—there was curiously little pride in it—that without her he would live in darkness.

‘That was a bad day for him,’ she reflected, ‘that twentieth-century day when he met Martina in Venice. . . .’

She wondered, and wished that she could remember, her first meeting with him as Harriet Fane. Somehow she felt convinced that it had taken place in winter; perhaps the lake had been frozen over; the rich meadows outside her window would have glittered with frost; the glorious beech-trees would have shivered, spectral.

He would have been shown—carelessly enough, since he was only a tutor—into the hall, where a great fire burned, its crimson glare casting crooked shadows upon the walls, and he would have been left to stand there while outside the brief day faded.

Then, while he waited, tall, and bright-headed, no doubt Harriet had come running down the staircase into the hall. What she wondered, not without amusement, had been the pretext? A spaniel sick in the housekeeper’s room? The mail, from London, with a copy of the ‘*Belle Assemblée*’—ideas for a new dress? Some orders for the groom—bran-mash for Sultan or Black Prince? A novel left in the Tapestry Room? Christmas, with carol-singers waiting on the terrace?

Whatever the motive, that picture of the girl running eagerly

downstairs remained, crystal-clear, in her mind. Why not? When she glanced in the mirror, she could see that girl's face. She could imagine the patter of feet, the rustle of a silk dress, the mischievous curiosity which sent her so boldly towards the stranger.

"Pray, sir, who left you here to wait?"

"Madam, I'm the new tutor. . . ."

She thought that it must have happened as simply as that. One look, passing between them, and both were captured. Perhaps, she considered, remembering how often he had snubbed her in Venice, perhaps she was at first disdainful. No doubt she had enjoyed her power. No scandal, then, had touched Harriet's name; she was a brilliant figure in London's most brilliant circle; she was courted, praised, and flattered; she danced till dawn at Melbourne House; she was a Whig child, of glittering heritage; so many young bucks were enslaved by her green eyes, and she could, in those days, have taken her pick; she was what Mrs. Betty called a honey-pot.

And he was her brother's tutor.

Yet, from that first meeting, there had been no choice; their destinies, from that moment, were always to be one and the same. She, in her time, had cast away her reputation for love of him, just as, more than a hundred years later, he would throw away all that he most cherished for love of her. People would always try to separate them, but these efforts would avail them nothing.

One day a miracle would happen, and they would be left alone together.

Tears came into her eyes at the very thought of such repose; she was so tired of being two people, of belonging nowhere; a great weariness possessed her soul; it was as though two voices within her cried out in vain for peace and, finding none, cried out stronger, for they would not consent to be silenced.

She wiped her eyes.

"That," she said to herself, "must be what's called a split personality. . . ."

Dusk had fallen.

The cows were clustered close together now, beneath the chestnut trees; the ewes and lambs were once more united. In the distance the cowman called his herd, and the shepherd's voice echoed across the park. The animals vanished, slowly, and, doubtless, in the village, lighted windows blazed, brighter than the petals of kingcups. Dusk flowed softly around Camelos. The dusk was like a bloom of grapes.

Watching from her window made her sorrowful, and so she turned to light her candles. They made her think of the first evening she had spent at Camelos. Butterfly-bright, they pricked the twilight with their twinkling yellow wings. She looked once more into the mirror, saw Harriet, and made a face at her—a friendly face, but she put a towel over the mirror. Her watch, a diamond strip—a present from Harriet's father, told her it was nearly seven. She had five hours to wait.

"Oh," she sighed, "how tired I am of being divided. . . ."
She fell asleep upon her bed.

She was aroused by Mrs. Betty.

"Your supper's just coming."

"Oh," she declared, still drowsy, "I'm not very hungry."

"You've crushed your dress," Mrs. Betty reproached her.

Martina said nothing. She lay on her bed and looked at the purple dusk of the open windows.

Mrs. Betty said:

"Dear, you've still a chance. . . . Sir John's dining with William . . . so far, although they've talked so long, they've not sat down to dinner. If you want, even now, to send down a message . . ."

"I've no message to send," Martina answered.

"My dear—listen—even now it will save you——"

"Run with the hare, hunt with the hounds!"

"I beg your pardon, Harriet!"

"You needn't bother to do that!"

"My dear, you realize you travel to Chelsea to-morrow morning?"

("Pray, sir, who left you here to wait?")

"Madam, I'm the new tutor. . . .")

Martina smiled, and Mrs. Betty stamped her foot.

"Harriet! This is your last chance! Sir John——"

"Will recover! Please go away!"

"Lord Rainsborough——"

"Go, will you please, and lock the door behind you!"

"Harriet! When your nurse was leaving, and I took her place——"

"She said I was a changeling! Well? What does it matter? Please, will you go?"

"Your supper——"

"Yes, I've changed my mind. I'll want my supper! You can't go without food for more than a hundred years!"

"Harriet!"

"Please go!"

"You can't have let that devil snatch your soul!"

"I'll pull the bell, for Emily!"

She looked at the window. The dusk had vanished, swallowed by the darkness; already it was night; as she listened, the stable-clock chimed eight.

"Her ladyship," Mrs. Betty declared, "is heartbroken...."

"Really? Then you'd better console her!"

"So you refuse——"

"I refuse anything you've come to ask! Please, will you go away?"

Mrs. Betty went, rustling, and the door slammed. The candle-flames quivered, in the draught, and she was left alone.

She thought she was more alone than anyone had ever been, and then, when her loneliness had driven her again towards the windows, she felt a certain comfort, knowing that Camelos, stronger than any of them, would continue. Camelos would never die. Camelos would remain. The house would be destroyed, the park would suffer from acres sold away, and yet Camelos itself would still endure.

Isabel, one day, would feed the descendants of those same peacocks that had once been coaxed by Harriet and by Caro Lamb, by poor deaf Hart, the Devonshire heir, and by his sisters.

Camelos would still go on, when those who had laughed and coquetted in its gardens were dust—less than dust. The clock would chime, would continue to chime when they lay tranquil in their graves—all of them, save Harriet. Harriet could never lie quietly in any grave because Harriet, who loved George Taylor, must surely haunt the world in which he lived a later life. This thought was a living nightmare.

"I can't bear it!" she cried, aloud, springing to her feet, as Emily unlocked the door.

Emily bore a tray of roast lamb and new potatoes.

"Your la'ship's hungry?"

"Put that food down, and go!"

"Sir John's below, with his lordship!"

"What do I care?"

"Listen!"

The door, for a moment, was open; from below Martina could hear Lady Rainsborough playing the spinet. She played coldly, crystal-clear; she was faultlessly playing Mozart.

"My lady!" Emily urged, "you could slip down now, and engage Sir John; you could turn black to white, and——"

"I'm sorry, but it's no use! You'd better lock the door behind you!"

"I shall have to come up for the tray!"

"Come soon!" Martina urged.

"Soon, your la'ship?"

"Yes, soon! I have a long journey before me; I want to sleep early to-night!"

"I'll come in half an hour."

"Good. . . ."

Martina, having nothing better to do, sat down before her mirror and began to paint her lips.

Emily hesitated on the threshold.

"My lady! Charles has been in the village to-night! He swears he ran into Mr. Taylor as he was leaving the inn!"

Martina shrugged her shoulders. She was not in the least surprised. She continued to paint her lips.

"What's that to me?" she asked.

"My lady! I've wanted so long to ask you—it isn't true, is it—that he's sold his soul to Satan?"

"No," said Martina, picking up a comb, "it isn't true."

"I thought not! Of all the stories!"

"Draw the curtains, will you? It grows cold."

Emily obeyed.

"My lady, I'm on your side! I'll leave the door unlocked, to-night!"

Martina was by this time incapable of expressing gratitude, but her face was radiant.

She caught Emily's hand. Her friendship with Emily surged once more into being.

"For—to-morrow you go to Chelsea! To Lady Dorothea, and I'm not even accompanying you——"

"You mustn't trouble yourself about that."

"But I do! Your la'ship's kindness——"

The stable clock struck once more.

Martina said:

"Go to bed, Emily, and God bless you. . . . If everything seems strange to-morrow, you mustn't trouble yourself, and, when Lady Harriet returns, you mustn't trouble her with questions!"

"Questions? But——"

"Good night, Emily. . . ."

Emily was thrust, protesting, outside into the passage. She was wary; she pretended to turn the key as she left her lady's room.

Lady Rainsborough continued to play the spinet.

CHAPTER LIII

RAINSBOROUGH DINED LATE that night with John Russell, who was sullen ; Lady Rainsborough had refused to eat with them and consequently Harriet ; both refused to dine. And William was angry, too ; charged with a message from Harriet while his mother sat in the Tapestry Room playing Mozart on the spinet ! He could hear her, but he shut his ears. He spoke scarcely at all during dinner ; he was wondering how he could best deliver Harriet's message.

He need not have wondered.

Sir John said suddenly :

" She's refused me, hasn't she—Lady Harriet ? "

" She's mad ! " Rainsborough declared sulkily.

" All the same she's refused me ? "

" To-night, yes. But——"

" Never mind—don't try to finish some polite speech ! She's refused me to-night. That's all that matters ! "

" She's going to my aunt in Cheyne Walk, in Chelsea village ! She'll die of boredom there—she'll——"

" Why," John Russell asked, " should she be sent to Chelsea ? "

" My dear fellow—why ? Because she's refused you ! My mother thinks to keep her there until——"

Russell interrupted him. He said :

" Her ladyship must be mad ! Harriet refuses me—why not ? Why should she take me ? Is that any reason for sending her to pine away in Chelsea ? "

" She must do as she's bid ! "

" Indeed ? Why should she ? "

Rainsborough poured some more port.

"Women," he said sententiously, "must do as they're told. . . ."

"Well," Russell declared, cradling his glass of port, "that, to my mind, is no way of seeking a wife . . . ! I'll never have Harriet until she's willing !"

"What makes you think she'll ever be willing ?"

"Nothing. But I'll not take her by force !"

"As you wish. But you'll never get her !"

"I should judge, Rainsborough," Sir John declared, looking into his glass, "that you've never been in love ?"

"In love ? I don't know what you mean. I've fancied wenches since I was a lad, but never as you fancy Harriet. I've never even wanted to marry. Not that I'd say no to a Golden Dolly !"

"Forgive me," Sir John blundered, "but I thought, at Brighton, you were taken by Miss Laval ?"

"I was," William scowled.

"Very beautiful," Sir John hazarded solemnly, accepting another glass of port.

William's scowl deepened. For a moment he brooded, twirling the stem of his glass, then he glanced up almost with defiance.

"Listen, Russell—I was in the same boat as you are—Chloe Laval preferred Taylor !"

Sir John stared in amazement.

"I swear," William persisted, "she preferred that devil !"

"These women," Sir John gasped, "they must all be demented ! And to think the fellow could not even remain faithful to Lady Harriet ! And he a friend of Black Jack's ! Friend to that damned rogue !"

"I wish to God," William commented, "I'd seen the scoundrel caught. There's been no such excitement here since I was born ! And to miss it by twenty-four hours !"

"A pretty friend," Sir John repeated, "for Master Taylor ! And, mark ye, Black Jack would have none of him ! That's the strange part of it, Rainsborough—even Black Jack denied him !"

"Your glass is empty!"

"Thank'ee."

"Why be surprised even one so base-born should deny the fiend? God, Russell, the fellow gave me the creeps! And in this very room——"

Once more he described, almost with relish, his glimpse of hell. The tutor had gone away, for ever, so that his terrors were stilled; he breathed in peace, now he knew the chaise had clattered away bearing his enemy; when Rainsborough was old he would still tell people how once he had met the devil face to face, and driven him away. . . .

"Let's have a game of backgammon," he suggested later.

"Agreed," and Sir John sighed. He said: "It's idle to deny I'm put out by Harriet's refusal. I had dreamed matters might come right for us. Perhaps they will—who knows? But I think it imprudent of Lady Rainsborough to send her away to Chelsea."

"It'll do her good."

"I don't agree," and he gulped down some more port, repeating: "I'll never take her, if she don't come to me of her own free will."

"Oh, have done with Harriet!" William cried impatiently. "We'll move to the morning-room and play backgammon!"

They rose solemnly, not quite steadily, from the table.

The spinet still sounded from the Tapestry Room.

"Lady Rainsborough sounds happy to-night," Sir John commented. "Is Lady Harriet with her?"

"Harriet's upstairs," William mumbled.

"Could we not——"

"No, we couldn't! She's retired. What about our game?"

They passed into the morning-room, where a lackey laid out their table, and William ordered more port.

"It's close in here, isn't it?" he said, after a few minutes.

"There'll soon be thunder."

"I'll draw the curtains," William declared, "and open the window. We'll get what air there is."

"Then do so, my friend, while I put out the men."

"There's a moon," Rainsborough observed at the window. He had pulled the curtains wide.

"I'll ride home the quicker! Come on—throw!"

Rainsborough threw the dice.

He said:

"You can't forget Harriet, can you?"

"Forget her? No, you're right. I'll never forget her. I'm a clod-hopper, and can't express meself like my Lord Byron. But Harriet's meat and drink to me, and wine, too. I don't know—damme if I know—how I'll make out without her. I'd set my heart, you see, on Harriet. . . ."

"You'll get her yet."

"Not by force!"

They both stopped; Lady Rainsborough had finished playing the spinet. Mozart no longer tinkled across the corridors of Camelos, for she was going to bed. They heard her voice calling, and a footman ran across the hall towards her; there was a pause, and then the front door was slammed, and her spaniel returned to her. Her candle was lighted, and she went on her way. There was silence from her quarters.

"You know, Rainsborough," Sir John declared, owlsh, "Lady Harriet must *not* be sent to Chelsea!"

"Are you taking this double?"

"I am. But——"

"What fools these sorcerers must be," William mused, moving his men, "to think that any race comes after us!"

"We're so perfect?"

"So civilized! Only savages can succeed us!"

"Voltaire said——"

"Double-six! Voltaire! And what about Lord Byron?"

"I've never read—yes, I'll take a double—I've never read Lord Byron's works. . . ."

William declared, pouring some more port: "I was in love with Lady Caro once. So was her cousin, Hart. He was my friend. She wouldn't look at either one of us . . . my game. . . ."

Sir John was absent-minded.

"Lady Harriet," he declared at last, "must be distracted by the very thought of Chelsea!"

The stable clock boomed.

"You're damned drunk!" William told him, moving his men.

"I love Harriet!"

"Throw! Do you realize she had promised to elope to-night with the tutor?"

Sir John became pompous.

"Who told you that, sir? What folly!"

"My mother, sir, my brother Francis, and Mrs. Betty! Do you like this double?"

"I like it, yes! She must be stopped!"

"What a lucky throw! She *has* been stopped!"

"That moon's too bright," Sir John declared, glancing at the French windows installed by William's father. He added: "And the sunset was red. There will be rain to-morrow! Mark my words, there will be rain!"

"A double game, I think!"

"You think right, curse you! I'm in no mood for play—can't I snatch a moment with Harriet before I leave?"

"I've told you, no! And you'd best not leave—you'll never find your way. There are rabbit-holes in the park!"

"Pilot is acquainted with 'em all. Are you taking off or putting on?"

William grinned.

"Putting on, of course! Tell me, if you're too bosky to see the men!"

"Bosky be damned! I see what I want!"

The moon poured, argent-clear, into the white-panelled morning-room where they sat beneath a sconce of guttering candles, taking snuff, breathing heavily upon the board.

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Sir John, his eyes fixed upon the windows.

"What now?"

Sir John climbed heavily to his feet.

"A ghost!"

William made a coarse reply. But Sir John grasped his arm, forcing him to his feet.

"Look, you fool! A woman—the ghost of a woman—crossing the lawn before us!"

William rose reluctantly. Together, they stared out into the moonlit shadows of the garden. As they looked a dark figure flitted across the grey, dewy lawn between the cedar trees.

"God!" William cried, and picked up the sconce of candles.

As though the figure heard them, it paused, so that its cloak fell, and then they saw the glimmer of a white dress.

"Harriet!"

William cursed.

"Rot her—she's eloping after all! Quick—Russell!"

Martina turned, dazed by the bright light, terrified by the two figures silhouetted in the window beneath the cluster of candles.

Then, as William ran from the windows, she fled.

The two men burst out into the garden.

Sir John called "Tally-ho!" as he ran.

It seemed an eternity since the stable clock had struck half-past eleven.

CHAPTER LIV

MARTINA HAD BEEN forced to wait in her room until half-past eleven for the excellent reason that Lady Rainsborough continued, below in the Tapestry Room, to play Mozart upon the spinet, and until she had retired it was impossible to risk the staircase.

Just as she was despairing, and about to risk the window, she heard the unmistakable sounds of her ladyship's departure to bed. The footman returning with the King Charles spaniel, the lighting of a candlestick from a table in the hall, a door opening along the passage as her woman, Mrs. Mellon, went along to her bedroom to attend her.

Then the brisk tapping of Lady Rainsborough's footsteps; the patter of the spaniel following at her heels.

Martina sat as though frozen on her bed; she thought her heart would stop, and then perhaps they would all of them be satisfied—she was so sure Lady Rainsborough would come to scold her once more in her room; sure that Lady Rainsborough would keep her there until it would be too late to find George in the temple.

But Lady Rainsborough did not pause on her way to bed. If naughty misses were to be punished they should, in her view, be punished properly; Harriet's disgrace was to be complete, and so she went on her way, erect, her candle-flame fluttering, her dog trotting behind her, straight towards her own apartments, and to Mrs. Mellon, who waited to undress her. She did not even glance at Harriet's door.

This danger passed, Martina began to tremble, as though with an ague. She must, she knew, now that she was so soon to stand at the threshold of the twentieth century, regard Lady

Rainsborough and her dog as what they so soon would be—as dust.

So she stopped trembling, and lighted another candle. Then she crept to the keyhole and listened. In a few minutes' time she heard Mrs. Mellon shut her lady's door softly, and then, in a few seconds, shut her own, and all was quiet.

Martina went to the wardrobe, and found a long cloak, of dark green cloth, in which she wrapped herself. Then she snuffed the candles, so that the room was unlit save for the ice-blue glitter of moonlight. But that light was strong; on a sudden impulse she went across to the mirror.

“Good-bye, Harriet. . . .”

But the moonlight, after all, must have been fainter than she had at first supposed, for the mirror was clouded; she could not distinguish Harriet's face.

She went, then, on tiptoe, pausing only to lock the door behind her so that Emily should not, the next day, be caught and punished. She had no light now, but the moonlight seemed brighter, so that she found her way surely down the staircase into the great hall where once a young man had looked up from beside the fire to see a girl run down to meet him. How long ago, she wondered, and then she thought: ‘Very nearly—in a few minutes—more than a hundred years ago!’

She was careful now; finding her way towards the Tapestry Room, she knew that there she would be safe, for Lady Rainsborough had sat in there alone to play the spinet. She thought Sir John had gone after dinner, and William, if he were still about, would be in the dining-room or the morning-room.

So she found her way past the library—dark and deserted—into the Tapestry Room. The crimson ruin of a fire still smouldered—Lady Rainsborough felt the cold—the recently extinguished candles smoked, and at the end of the room was a window which she knew opened easily.

She would have liked to look her last upon this lovely room, but she was afraid now of being late, and softly, so as not to make a noise, she opened the window. As she slipped over the sill a shaft of moonlight fell upon the gilded harp standing in

the corner. That, she thought, with a sigh, was the last of Camelos. She dropped lightly into the flower-bed below, picked herself up, and began to cross the lawn towards the lake. She had forgotten her watch, and it seemed to her an eternity since she had heard half-past eleven strike, but she had striven to keep her brain clear, and she thought she had an easy fifteen minutes in which to find the temple.

Her horror when she suddenly saw light streaming from the morning-room, when she realized that William must have drawn the curtains, made her pause for a moment, uncertain ; it was while she hesitated that she saw the two figures at the window and knew that they, too, had seen her. Then her cloak slipped, and she heard them shouting.

It was as she began to run, leaving her cloak behind her, that she experienced a sensation she would never forget, no matter how long she lived, nor how many lives ; she knew, perhaps, the most awful feeling of all—the sensation of being hunted.

She stopped behind the cedar trees and heard footsteps thunder past her. She was gasping, and her heart raced. She cursed the loss of her cloak, knowing that in her light dress she could be seen from a long way away. She knew, too, that the moon, which had stood her friend, was now her enemy. She cowered, almost sobbing, against the cedar trunks. In a moment she would have to run again, for she had lost five minutes. Not far away from where she crouched she heard the men shouting.

“ She’s by the lake—must be——” Sir John roared.

“ No ! ” William called, “ she can’t have got through. She’s still near the house ! Come back, will you—and look for her ! ”

Sir John called :

“ Harriet ! Harriet ! ”

She realized that they were both drunk, and for that she was, despite her terror, grateful. She thought she might elude them in a moment when they had passed the cedars. If only they would pass the cedars !

“ She’ll never get past us ! ” William declared.

"Never! We'll snare her near the house!"

She did not think, then, that she was so grateful for their drunkenness, for their voices were the voices of strangers. She would not have recognized William, whom she looked on as her brother, nor would she have recognized Sir John, whom she had often found so kind.

These men were savages. They continued to talk with a gleeful ferocity of how they would catch her, and where; they talked of her not as a woman that both loved, but as though she were a fox, or a hare. They drew closer to the cedars.

Her heart, she thought, must burst; she could not afford to wait for many minutes; she would have to run, as it was, if luck favoured her, all the way to the temple. She drew closer against the tree-trunks. She should have been cold in her dimity dress, but she was not; sweat poured down her face, but perhaps, without knowing it, she was cold, for her teeth chattered.

"I'll beat round here," William declared, pausing near the cedars.

She broke covert then. What else was there to do?

She fled straight across the lawn towards the darkness of the lake, towards where the white blot of the temple glimmered—far away, it seemed to her—in the moonlight.

"Gone away!" William yelled.

She heard their footsteps thudding in pursuit. It was at that point that she became temporarily unconscious of her driven body, her gasping breath, her bruised feet, and the treacherous heart that struck, like a gong, against her ribs. It seemed to her that she no longer ran; she floated; she was on air.

She turned into the rhododendron-walk without being caught, and, with that spurt, was no longer unconscious of her own distress. No longer now did she feel as though she moved on air. Now, if she had had time, she would have crept to rest amongst the bushes, but she had no time, since time had not yet ceased to count; she knew that

she was desperately pressed, and so she ran on, stumbling, panting, calling, in her mind, to George.

Behind her pounded heavy footsteps.

As a child, whether as Martina or as Harriet, when she had played at hide-and-seek she had always hated that game. Now she knew why she had so much dreaded it.

Far away—five hundred yards away—she heard someone shouting. It was William. Then, behind her—close behind her—she heard Sir John call back, but his voice was still unfamiliar. It was the voice of a hound giving tongue.

She ran on. She was gasping now; she felt as though she were choking, and a stitch tore painfully at her side. She was too exhausted, even, for her earlier primitive terror to spur her on. She did not think that anything, much longer, would spur her on her way. Not even the steady, pounding footsteps so doggedly pursuing her.

Her heart was beating somewhere near her throat.

Her mind reeled, and her eyes glazed.

She thought:

'I'm nearly there . . . nearly at the temple . . . if only . . . if only . . . he didn't run . . . so hard. . . .'

Somehow then, as her dazed mind spun in a mist, she thought of Martina Forest meeting Barradale in Venice, with pigeons fluttering in the sunshine above their heads. He had painted her in a Spanish shawl. Later they had run away together in his motor car. But what was Harriet doing in Venice without her mother? Where was William then? Where was Sir John? Where was Mrs. Betty?

She heard a strange, hoarse, ugly sound, and did not even recognize it as her own breathing. Now she ran mechanically, almost unconscious of the stitch crippling her side. She was on the beach at Brighton, telling George how much she loved him, when she should have been long ago at the temple. Lady Rainsborough played Mozart on the spinet, and she sat in the sun making a 'tossy-ball' of cowslips, and someone hanged a highwayman, and someone else called her a changeling, and the Regent held her hand, and she stifled in the heat of a

hundred candles. She seemed to hear the roar of mighty engines, and then she thought that in the distance, mellow, musical, she heard the striking of the stable clock at Camelos.

She caught her foot in a root and fell, heavily, upon the grass. Pain shot through her foot like fire. She had sprained her ankle. Then she must crawl to the temple; she must crawl to where he waited. She raised herself, sobbing, on her hands and knees. Her foot trailed helplessly behind her. It was then that she heard the booming of the stable clock. Her fall had sobered her. This was no dream, no fantasy. The clock was striking twelve. She cried out, as she heard those grave, majestic chimes:

"George! George!"

Behind her thundered the footsteps of John Russell.

("Pray, sir, who left you here to wait?")

"Madam, I'm the new tutor. . . .")

She still dragged herself along as the clock struck.

John Russell, himself panting desperately, caught the gleam of her dress, and flung himself down beside her. He was no longer her friend. He was her destroyer. The lust of hunting her down possessed him in his drunkenness, so that nothing else had any importance.

'Seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . ' the great clock echoed across the lake.

She continued to drag herself along on her hands and knees. Vaguely conscious that she was moving, he snatched at her hair. Then he cupped his other hand about his mouth and shouted to William down below.

"Snared!" he cried, as though to awaken the dead, "snared! I've got her!"

"What?" cried William, near the lake.

The clock chimed on, mellow, unflurried.

'Ten . . . eleven . . . '

"Snared!"

'Twelve. . . .'

Harriet sighed.

She was unconscious.

CHAPTER LV

GEORGE, WAITING IN the temple, the book on the table before him, with his watch and a stump of candle, heard half-past eleven strike with a feeling of dismay. He looked at his watch, but did not really heed it, since it was the Camelos clock for which he waited.

His faith in her was so great that he could not understand her delay; it never for a moment occurred to him that she could have been locked in her room, treated as a prisoner. He thought her late, or languid; imagined her, for a sickening moment, turning over music with Sir John, and cursed her for keeping him on tenterhooks.

He looked about him.

The temple, fitfully illuminated by his dwindling candle, seemed damp enough, and dark enough, even in the moonlight that cast a blanched light upon its pillars. There were spiders there, and he was sure that there were bats. He thought the place smelled of mushrooms. He fidgeted, walking to and fro, then he looked at his watch.

Fifteen minutes to midnight!

His rage, that was partly terror, made him tremble as he waited.

How could she, he thought, have cut it so fine! She knew only too well what he was suffering. Then, in his emotion, he cursed her, violently, for her unpunctuality. She had no right to 'play him up,' to frighten him until he scarcely knew what he was doing, or where he was! This was no ordinary journey—it was not as though he waited, in Paris, for her to catch a Blue Train! This was a journey more grave than she realized; although they had talked lightly of crossing time,

although they had already done it, the actual spanning of two centuries remained too mysterious for her to treat so casually.

When he saw that it was ten minutes to twelve, he experienced his first doubts. They were cold and deadly, these doubts; they chilled him to the bone, and he felt sick.

He wrenched his eyes from the ticking watch, and thought, as he had tried not to think, during his vigil, that she lacked the courage to come to him. What, he reflected dispassionately, had he to offer? No marriage, little enough money, and a world she hated!

She loved the past, she loved luxury, and she loved her position. She was so proud as Harriet Fane; why the devil should she creep back into the twentieth century to live obscurely, in a time she hated, as his mistress?

He cried out, then:

'She loves me!'

Surely she loved him enough?

He forced himself then to look at his watch by the dripping candle. The flame flickered, so nearly dead that he could scarcely see; but he saw the hands pointed to five minutes to twelve.

He felt lost, then. He mumbled prayers, cupping his hands over the dying light as though to preserve it fiercely, as though to force it into flame.

She *could* not fail him! He was sure that he knew her too well. He knew her faithfulness, her courage, and her resolution. She had determined to remain with him, and she would abide by her word. He would swear to that, he told himself.

The candle-flame, dying, fluttered so fast that he could scarcely see his watch, but he managed.

Two minutes to twelve.

He knew that she was not coming. There was no hope. This knowledge petrified his heart, but he could not blame her. How could he? He knew then, as surely as he knew she was not coming, that he could not force himself to stay behind for her. What did that mean? It meant, he supposed, that they were, both of them, too puny

to be of the stuff from which undying love is woven ; they lacked nobility. Heroism was not for them ; he was no more Romeo than she was Juliet.

"The fearful passage of their death-marked love. . . ."

That was not for George Barradale, nor was it for Harriet Fane. They were too craven. They were no star-crossed lovers—they lacked the strength of mind, and so they were to be parted.

Nor, he knew instinctively, would she ever be able to return alone, once having identified herself with Harriet Fane.

'Oh, God,' he thought, 'I don't blame her. . . .'

The stable clock began to strike midnight.

He put his hands on the book. It was as though he willed to be stronger than he was, but he could not will himself. He *could* not live as George Taylor.

"Martina . . . Martina. . . ."

'Seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . ' chimed the clock.

"Harriet !"

He thought, too, of Venice ; she had loved him then, and he had thought that she would always love him. But she had not been strong enough. It was not her fault, nor his ; she had failed him, and now he was to fail her. He laid his hand upon the book before him, and cried out for the twentieth century.

'Ten . . . eleven . . . '

As he called, his dying candle expired, and he was left in the darkness, groping.

'Twelve !'

He heard a loud, humming noise, louder than the rumble of a hundred coaches. He thought that it must be the sound of an aeroplane. He caught a glimpse of light ; he walked alone—he passed, breasting the darkness, somewhere into the mists of the twentieth century.

William came running up to join Sir John.

"You've got her ?"

"Yes . . . we've frightened her. She's swooned."

"We'll soon carry her back——"

He paused, looking up at the sky.

"What's that, Russell? Bees swarming?"

Sir John listened for a moment, Harriet's head resting on his breast.

"Yes—angry, too!"

"It's not bees! How could they make so loud a noise? It's thunder!"

"No," said Russell, "that's not thunder."

"The wind, then!"

"There's no wind."

For a moment, as they stood motionless, it would seem that an aeroplane passed overhead, and was gone.

"A shooting star!" Sir John declared.

"Do stars roar?" and William, thinking of the hell that had once been shown him, shivered, forgetting his sister.

It was then that Harriet opened her eyes, so that the two men, who had hunted her so cruelly, were completely sobered and contrite.

She murmured something.

"What does she say?" William asked.

"I think she said she was too late."

"Too late!"—William thought again of the roaring sound, of the shooting star, like no star he had ever seen—"too late! Thank God she was—that's all I have to say! Come—I'll help you carry her back to Mrs. Betty!"

They carried her back; they were as gentle, then, as they were cruel, before.

What, she thought, was the good of that? George had gone away from her, and her life was over.

She whispered again:

"Too late. . . ."

They were kind to her, and they cosseted her. They were ashamed of themselves. But it was too late, and she did not care now what happened to her. She, too, had heard an aeroplane. Too late. He was gone. She could have been

with him. But they were carrying her back to Camelos, and she would never see him again.

They took her to Mrs. Betty, who cried :

"It's her ankle !"

She answered to that : "it's my life."

"Dearest . . ."

"My life's over," said Harriet Fane, and turned her face away from the light.

PART SIX • 1938

CHAPTER LVI

ISABEL CAME OUT of the house into August sunshine, followed by her butler. She stood for a moment, looking across the lake at the park, glowing emerald, darkly blotted by the shadows of thickly growing trees. Cattle sheltered beneath these oaks and chestnuts. They loved the shade, and would not venture into the sunshine.

Isabel said :

" Sir Daniel Isaacs is coming by the seven o'clock. You know about meeting him ? "

" Yes, my lady. Jackson had the orders."

" It's so warm to-night that I think we'll dine on the terrace. There will only be the three of us."

" Yes, my lady."

" We'll have dinner at half-past eight. Do you know where his lordship is ? "

" I believe he went down to the lake to fish, after tea."

" Very well, Grant, that's all."

" Thank you, my lady."

She went back into the house. When she had had her bath, and was drying herself, she heard footsteps in the passage. She would always know those footsteps. But she waited until he knocked upon the door.

" Come in ! "

George came into the room. He wore shorts and a dark-blue sweater.

" Hullo ! " she said, drying her toes.

"Hullo! I've had no luck—not a single bite."

"Darling, you won't be late, will you?"

"Late?"

"For Sir Daniel. He's arrived already—I heard the car. I said we'd dine on the terrace. It's such a perfect night. Is that all right?"

"Lovely!"

"He came by the seven o'clock."

"Good," he said, "I was expecting a parcel by that train."

"Caviare, by any chance?"

"Good Lord, no! Something from someone at the British Museum."

There was a pause.

She said:

"It's fun, isn't it—having Sir Daniel here as a guest instead of a doctor?"

"It's grand."

"You do like him, don't you?"

"I think he's a great man."

"I thought it would be more fun having him to ourselves. That's why I didn't ask anyone else."

"Quite right. I'm glad to know he hasn't been brought down here again to be embarrassed with Pretty Peeps from the Past!"

"George!"

He smiled.

"I didn't mean to tease you. I'm as glad as you are—to meet Sir Daniel in mufti."

"You'd better hurry, hadn't you?"

"I won't be long," he told her casually.

But he did not hurry; he took his time. He wanted to be late; he was unselfish in this desire; he knew that Isabel would like to meet Sir Daniel Isaacs alone, and so he lingered.

She went to meet him in the Silver Drawing Room.

She wore a dinner-dress of deep blue, sprinkled with silver. She looked beautiful and confident.

Sir Daniel, who had been reading the *Tatler*, sprang quickly

to his feet. He was a fragile and beautiful Jew ; his features might have been carved from old ivory ; his dark liquid eyes were strangely penetrating, his nose was like a hawk's beak, and his hair was a silver cap against the darkness of his face.

"Well, Lady Herries, there's no need to ask how you are !"

The butler brought in cocktails. She sent him away to hurry George, and said to Sir Daniel :

"I can't tell you how much we've been looking forward to this week-end."

Sir Daniel's eyes twinkled. He looked suddenly younger as he said, drinking his cocktail :

"Well, I see there's no need to ask how everything is !"

She smiled.

"It's almost perfect ! When I think that this time last year . . ."

"Don't think ! That's over and done with !"

"Yes . . . I know."

"And Lord Herries ?"

"Oh, physically, he couldn't be better ! And, mentally," she hesitated, watching the bright dark eyes which suddenly ceased to twinkle, and which regarded her like black diamonds, "well, mentally, he's very much better, of course."

"Much better ! May I ask what you mean, when you say that ?"

"Of course ! I mean that, to anyone who didn't know him before—he's—he's as well as he ever was !"

The dark eyes twinkled once again.

"But that's good news, Lady Herries !"

"Oh, yes," she agreed, "I know it is ! It's only—well, he's never changed his mind, you know !"

"Obstinacy is sometimes a healthy quality !"

"I know it is. But . . . this obstinacy of his . . . he won't speak to me about it, even now, you know. He's so reserved that . . . unless he starts talking about it, I never do. And he doesn't talk very often !"

The twinkling eyes became hard once more, as Isabel filled up the cocktails, and Sir Daniel said :

"You mustn't expect a lot of co-operation after such a severe break-down."

"No . . . I know."

"You've never managed to find out where he was, those five weeks ?"

"No," she said, "never. Not until he was found, unconscious, in the temple near the lake. Not until all the trouble began."

"You're very wise not to press him. You must never press him. Never !"

"I know."

There was a pause.

Then Sir Daniel said, with a lively curiosity, not at all like that of a doctor's :

"That girl ? They never found her body ?"

Isabel turned pale. She had not been expecting this question. For a moment she hesitated, then she said :

"No ! And it isn't, really, a question of finding a body, is it ? It's a question of finding the girl herself !"

"Forgive me," Sir Daniel smiled, "I've expressed myself badly. It is, of course, a question of finding the young lady herself."

"Well," Isabel said, with a note of defiance, "they can't find her—any of them ! The police can't find her, nor can her own family ! Thank God, they've moved away from here—the family, I mean. They've gone to Yorkshire."

Sir Daniel smiled, pressing his finger-tips together. He said :

"I must remind you that, from the first, when I was called in, I laughed at that particular supposition. Lord Herries may have been—and was—sick in mind, but he wasn't, never could have been—a murderer !"

Isabel poured herself another cocktail. Her hand was shaking.

She said :

"Of course not ! There's no question of it ! It was simply

that this girl, staying in the same village, chose to disappear the same night as George disappeared. They'd known each other once, but there was nothing to connect them—nothing! And, thank God, my poor father-in-law prevented any publicity! Nobody knows! Nobody, that is, but you and her relations, and Dr. Marshall, and the police, who've long ago given up connecting the two disappearances!"

Sir Daniel drained his cocktail. Then he said, and his eyes did not twinkle as he spoke:

"Lady Herries, as it's all finished and done with—tell me something. Does Lord Herries still consider himself pledged to this—well, I can only think of her as this lost girl—this girl he persists in connecting with the past? Is she dead to him, or does he still——?"

"No," she said firmly, interrupting him, "all that's finished! He's much more sensible now! That obsession belonged to his illness."

He knew, for he knew many things, that she was lying. But he said nothing, and at that moment George came into the Silver Drawing Room.

"Sir Daniel! I can't apologize enough for being late—I had something important to do! Yes—Isabel, a cocktail, please, and if dinner's cold, you can both blame me!"

"Well," Sir Daniel declared, with genuine pleasure, "there's no need to ask you how you are! You look splendid!"

George laughed.

"English sun makes you browner than any other sun—when you get it! Look here—you've got to drink another cocktail—otherwise I'll be in disgrace! Please!"

"Thanks," Sir Daniel said.

He pretended to drink, looking, in his secret way, at the man who, a year ago, had been his patient. He decided, on second thoughts, that young Lord Herries was not so fit as he had first supposed; his face, beneath the sun-tan, was too lean, and there were dark stains beneath his vivid blue eyes. Perhaps, too, those eyes were too bright for health. But Sir

Daniel was tired of being a doctor, and he had, after all, been asked as a friend to Camelos. A friend who had saved them all much trouble ! He was looking forward to his week-end.

"Dinner is served !" cried the butler, and they moved towards the terrace.

CHAPTER LVII

SIR DANIEL ENJOYED his dinner.

Salmon, roast duck, pine-apple ice, and a savoury—all exquisitely served with a dry and fragrant hock. He complimented his host on the wine.

"We'd better make the most of it," George said, "there's not much of it left, and it doesn't look as though we'll be able to go on getting it. . . ."

For a short time they talked international politics.

The night was violet-dark, for they had dined late; the candlesticks made their table a little bright island in the blackness of the evening.

"Not cold?" George asked his wife once.

"Not a bit."

Sir Daniel felt extraordinarily pleased. He found them a delightful young couple. They had, he reflected, everything in the world to make them happy, with the exception of an heir, and no one, on this earth, could hope to live in paradise. But they had youth, beauty, riches, charm, and, he believed, happiness; it was as though that ugly thing, that illness and scandal of a year ago, had never existed; had never arisen to menace their peace. If the young man looked a little strained and tired, well . . . it was known that he worked hard, wishing to establish himself as a painter. . . .

When Isabel left them, going indoors towards the Silver Drawing Room, they drew their chairs together while Sir Daniel sampled a rare brandy.

"You don't drink it?" said he to his host.

George shook his head.

"No," he said, his hand on a decanter, "I stick to port."

There was a pause, while he held up his glass and drank in silence.

"Do you know," Sir Daniel remarked, amused, "you looked almost, then, as though you were drinking a toast!"

George smiled.

"As a matter of fact, I was. I was drinking to a fellow I used to know. It's almost a ritual with me"—his eyes twinkled—"you see, he had better port than I have!"

"And you can't forgive him?"

"Oh, yes! I've forgiven him."

There was a pause.

"Lady Herries tells me," Sir Daniel said, "that you'll be off towards the end of the month?"

"We shall. But as she probably told you, we can't make up our minds where to go. We love sun, but we're sick of the South of France. I like mountains, but they don't agree with Isabel. So we're still arguing!"

"What about the Lido? Do you both hate that?"

The young man's charming face suddenly darkened. For the first time, Sir Daniel decided that he had a devil of a temper.

"I hate it," he declared almost with violence; he added: "I expect we shall go to Morocco."

For a short time they talked, conventionally, of Morocco.

Then Herries asked, with a suddenness so abrupt as to sound almost awkward:

"My wife's a different proposition now, compared to what she was twelve months ago, isn't she?"

"She certainly is. But then, if I may say so, there's a reason for it. You're an entirely different proposition, yourself, from the man I treated a year ago!"

"Ah!"

It seemed to Sir Daniel that there was a fierceness in the way that this was said. But Herries, after a moment, smiled.

"I'm glad to hear it," was his comment. He drank some more port. Then he said, and his voice was suddenly confidential:

"Sir Daniel, I wish you'd explain something I've always wanted to know . . . if you will, please explain it simply, as though to an idiot child, because I can't grasp medical terms . . . just what is schizophrenia?"

Sir Daniel was silent for a moment. He was surprised by the intensity with which this question was put. It occurred to him then that this young man, outwardly so calm, still suffered, after a year, from the torment of treacherous nerves. Those break-downs, of course, were the devil, as no one should know better than himself, and he knew, too, that Herries was cured. But still, his father's death just after his own illness . . . no wonder he was still inclined to be tense and wary.

"Schizophrenia," he said musingly; "well, I suppose it's most simply described in two words—split personality."

"Ah!"

Then, bluntly, almost crudely:

"May I ask you—don't answer if you'd rather not—did you ever think, during my illness, that I was suffering from schizophrenia?"

"Good God, no! My dear Herries, what on earth put such an idea into your head?"

Sir Daniel looked absolutely horrified. But George smiled with great charm. He lit his cigar with a hand as steady as a rock.

"I only wondered—but it must be such a bore to have shop talked to you!"

"It isn't in the least a bore," Sir Daniel assured him warmly. "I was only wondering how such a preposterous idea ever occurred to you?"

"Well . . ." he smiled again, "I know I was always rambling when I was ill, about the past. I thought I was living there. Isn't that a sign of split personality?"

"Not necessarily. In your case certainly not. There's all the difference in the world, my dear fellow, between a nervous break-down and incipient insanity! Do get that into your head, once and for all!"

"Oh," and his voice was indifferent, "I know I was never insane, if that's what you mean."

Sir Daniel smoked, watching him intently, with dark, bright eyes. What a contradictory character! Imaginative, obstinate, and unreliable! Herries, at his most ordinary moments, he decided, must be difficult, as a husband. Yet, because of his charm, he would always attract women; and his wife was obviously in love with him.

Once again Sir Daniel was absorbed by his chief passion—the study of human beings. There was, he knew, no fascination to equal it.

George asked:

"You'd agree, wouldn't you, that I'm absolutely cured?"

"Absolutely," the doctor told him with emphasis. "I've no doubts whatever. If that's worrying you——"

"It isn't worrying me. It isn't worrying me in the least. But I'd like to tell you something."

"By all means do."

George said seriously, frowning into his glass:

"I suppose you'll think I'm very stubborn. If you don't, you must put it down to the fact that I was extremely ill for several weeks, and that I'm still influenced by the hallucinations I undoubtedly had at that time."

"What are you driving at?" Sir Daniel asked. But already he was sure he knew what he was going to hear.

"Just this: I was ill, of course, for a very definite and specific reason. I was ill because I'd been through what I suppose is a unique experience. Mind you, I don't pretend to explain it in any way. I can't tell you if it was a form of dream-existence, or of reincarnation, or whether it was a mental black-out. Personally, I should think it was the last, but I've no means of judging—I know nothing about these matters."

"Yes?" Sir Daniel pressed, very gently.

"It really happened, that's all. I went back into the past. I was there when I was supposed to have lost my memory. I *never* lost my memory—sometimes, nowadays, I wish to God I could!"

Once again he spoke with violence.

Sir Daniel was more fascinated than he would have believed possible. Still with an exquisite gentleness, so as not to frighten this strange bird, he suggested :

"You were happy, in what you think of as the past?"

"No, of course I wasn't! I didn't fit it—I didn't belong anywhere. It was a nightmare—it was that made me ill afterwards—nothing else! But she——"

Here he stopped, as though regretting what he had said. For a moment he looked curiously ravaged. He glanced sharply at his companion. But Sir Daniel was smoking tranquilly.

George continued :

"The girl—the girl there was all the fuss about—*she* loved it, you see. She belonged there. She couldn't force herself, when it came to the point, to—well, to come back here."

He looked at Sir Daniel with a sort of hard defiance in his eyes, and re-lit his cigar.

"As an alienist," he said, "you must have heard many stories like mine?"

"Not quite like yours," Sir Daniel answered. "Won't you go on? You're interesting me enormously. You mean, don't you, that the girl who disappeared from here is the one connected in your mind with this—visit to the past?"

"Yes. But *she* wasn't visiting, as you call it. She belonged there. That was the trouble."

"How, then, do you explain the undoubted fact of her existence in the twentieth century?"

"I prefer not to explain it! That's the whole thing! I *can't* explain it! But I thought perhaps you might . . ."

His eyes were no longer defiant, but pleading. He watched Sir Daniel with an intense, an almost pitiful anxiety.

"I can offer no possible explanation," the doctor said, after a pause.

"None?"

"No. If this girl had never existed to-day, as she did, the explanation would be a simple one, wouldn't it? You'd merely

have created an imaginary personality, real to you, no doubt, but not to anyone else. But you didn't. The girl who shared the experience with you was someone associated with your own days. She had friends and relations—she was known. And she disappeared."

"I'm sure the police think I did away with her," George declared impatiently.

"I'm quite sure they think nothing of the sort. As for me, my friend, I've known too many murderers to be easily deceived. You, whatever your faults, are not a murderer! That theory's futile!"

"Thank you!"

"You've no need to thank me. It's obvious."

"Do you believe I really travelled into the past?"

"Frankly, I can't believe that. But I'm quite sure you had a definite dream-existence in this past you speak of. It's probably more vivid to you than anything else you remember. That, you know, is a not uncommon experience."

"How then," George asked, "do you explain Mar—this girl's disappearance?"

"Ah! I've already told you—that I can't begin to explain."

"You see, she wouldn't come back here. She tried to make herself return, but in the end she couldn't. I see she was right now, but I didn't think so then. I was in love with her. I still——" he broke off.

"Lord Herries," Sir Daniel asked, "haven't you yourself some explanation for the strange things that appear to have happened to you?"

"No explanation of mine would satisfy a doctor."

Sir Daniel smoked for a minute in silence. Then he said:

"I thought, you know, I'd come down here as a friend, not as a doctor. Can't you talk to me as a friend? Can't you give me some explanation?"

●

CHAPTER LVIII

“YES!” GEORGE SAID abruptly, “I can.” He drew a deep breath and continued, speaking rapidly:

“This is what happened: I met Martina in the twentieth century, when she was a child of sixteen. She was in love with me, but I honestly didn’t know it. Then I married. A few years afterwards I met her again, and then I knew I was in love with her. She was poor and obscure, and I couldn’t offer her marriage. I asked my wife for a divorce, but she wouldn’t agree.

“So we went away, Martina and I, but not as you think. I sincerely believe we travelled back into the nineteenth century. I was a tutor then, and she was the daughter of a great family—she wasn’t allowed to look at me. In fact our positions were completely reversed. I knew, directly, that all this was unreal; it was a bad fairy tale come true, if you know what I mean. To me, but not to her. That’s how *she* regarded to-day. After we’d been there a little time, I saw that she was fitting in, more and more; she *was* this dead girl, who wasn’t, then, really dead; it was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. But she belonged there all right, and I didn’t. We quarrelled a lot, always about coming back to—to present-day life. She hated the idea, more and more. Yet she forgot more and more—I mean, about nowadays. She didn’t pretend to be this girl, Harriet; she *was* Harriet. And so, when it came to the point, she decided to stay behind, and, as you know, she did stay behind. That’s why she vanished from here. There was no place for her in this world, just as there was no place for me in hers. We loved one another all right, but I suppose our love just wasn’t strong enough. I hadn’t the courage to stay

there any more than she, when it came to the point, had the courage to come back here."

Sir Daniel started, for he thought that someone sighed beside him, and for a moment he believed that Lady Herries had stolen back onto the terrace to overhear a conversation of which she would most strongly have disapproved. But she was not there; no one had sighed, and so Sir Daniel continued to contemplate his own beautiful hands.

"Well?" George urged.

Sir Daniel said, still looking at his hands:

"That's a plausible story. More plausible than many such I've heard! But it's not an explanation. You haven't given me an explanation yet."

"I've got one," George said, not without reluctance.

"Please won't you tell me what it is?"

"Of course! It won't satisfy you any more than it satisfies me, but I should like you to hear it."

"Yes?"

Sir Daniel leaned forward, watching him intently.

George said, looking at the table, tracing imaginary figures on the cloth:

"I don't think either she or I were fit to meet in either of these two existences. I think they were both a form of test. She was as headstrong then as I'm headstrong now. We were certainly both of us too self-willed ever to be unselfish. We were tested, and we were found wanting."

"Yes?"

"I don't know if I believe in third chances. But if by some miracle they exist, and we meet again, then I know there will be no mistake. Not again. Not for us!"

"Do you think either one of you will be given such a chance?"

"I think so, yes. Perhaps mostly because, if I didn't, my life wouldn't be worth living. I've got to think so."

"I see that."

"It's getting cold," George said, "we'd better go in."

Sir Daniel started. He had entirely forgotten his hostess.

"Lady Herries——"

"She hasn't had such a good time with me, as you can well imagine."

"Does she know what you've told me?"

"No. But she knows . . ." he hesitated a moment, then continued, "she knows I'm in love with . . . Harriet."

"An experiment in time," Sir Daniel commented thoughtfully. He stared out into the darkness as though, somewhere, he would read the answer to a riddle. But it eluded him.

"Many people," George hazarded, "must have talked to you like this?"

"As a matter of fact, they haven't."

"You won't put me in a padded cell?"

"Oh, don't joke about it!" Sir Daniel exclaimed. Then, suddenly, he knew that George had not been joking. He turned swiftly:

"Good God! If you seriously think you're mad, I shall abandon you—both as a doctor and a friend."

"Thank you," George said, "you've done me more good to-night, as both, than you'll ever believe." He added, after a pause: "Sometimes you feel you've got to talk. I did to-night. That's why I'm glad you're here. I couldn't have talked to anyone else."

"There's something I should like to know," Sir Daniel remarked.

"What is it?"

"The girl. I wonder what happened to her?"

"But I've told you——"

"No. I mean in the past. When you left her. I wonder what sort of life she had?"

Once again he noticed that curious, ravaged look.

"I know," George said.

"Yes?"

"I made it my business to find out. And I did, through experts of the period, a few months ago. People from the museums. And only to-night—but I'll show you. We'll go to the studio for a minute."

"Willingly. I must confess I'd like to hear the end of the story. The end, or the beginning!"

"You don't think much of my explanation of the whole business, do you?"

There was a pause.

Then Sir Daniel heard himself say to his own surprise:

"As a matter of fact, it's interested me more than anything I've heard for a very long time. The explanation itself, combined with the facts I already knew."

"You don't by any chance believe me?"

"As a scientist, no. I have no proof! As a friend, who's beginning to know you, yes. I'm not easily deceived, you know; I've had too much experience. And I usually recognize sincerity when I see it. . . ."

A few minutes later they went in to the studio.

How long they were, Isabel thought. She listened vaguely to the radio, and wondered how they were getting on. Well, she imagined; otherwise they wouldn't have sat so long. She hoped that they would like one another, as friends; Sir Daniel would make an excellent friend for George, as he had made him an excellent doctor.

She shook her head, impatiently. She could not bear to think of his illness.

She had been so certain, then, that he was not only mad, but a murderer. As it was, whenever she thought of Martina Forest's disappearance, she felt cold and sick, since that disappearance had never yet been explained. Yet George, in his illness, had talked of other women. Mostly of Harriet. She had, at first, been bitterly jealous of Harriet—until she discovered the girl had been dead for more than a hundred years. But there was another woman, too; a woman called Chloe. Once or twice, when he was half asleep, George still called her by this woman's name. She knew, then, that she hated Chloe even more than the poor little dead Harriet he loved so much, more even than Martina, who had vanished, leaving them at last

—she touched wood—in peace. She hated Chloe because she did not know who Chloe was; she had never been able to discover the woman's identity.

'One always dreads the unknown,' she thought, switching off the radio.

Harriet, of course, was only a dream.

There were great clusters of lilies in the Silver Drawing Room; she saw them reflected in the mirror, when she pulled out her vanity-case. She thought, with annoyance, of a maid who had given notice that morning because she declared the house was haunted. How could the house be haunted when the greater part of it was practically modern? That sort of unpleasantness reminded her all too vividly of the trouble she had had with Cheyne Walk, and she had no wish to be reminded of that.

She painted her lips, and thought once more of her marriage.

It was better, now, and she forced herself to remember this; it was much, much better. He was thoughtful, and charming, and dependent upon her; there were no rages, no more scenes. Those, she reflected, had ended with Martina Forest's disappearance. He was gentle now; he was a better husband than he had been since the first year of their marriage. Ever since the combined nightmares of his vanishing, his illness, and his father's death, he had seemed to settle down.

She never, even now, cared to think of that five weeks' disappearance. She was too afraid of believing that he had been with Martina, who had never been seen again, and those thoughts, although secret, were too dangerous.

If sometimes he seemed to her more an empty shell than a man, she reminded herself that they were no longer young. They had been married, now, for some time. Their first youthful passion was burned out—only a fool would have thought it could have lasted longer. They had the same interests; they liked the same books, concerts, travelling, and the theatre. There was no other man for her, no other woman for him, despite his mutterings when he was ill, or dreaming.

She was convinced that there would never have been an

infatuation for Martina had he not been ill, and half-distracted at the time. That was over, too. Martina had—gone away.

As usual, she cast her thoughts away from Martina. He was painting well, too, although he no longer worked so hard. He seemed to get tired easily. That, of course, was a result of his illness—he would soon recover his energy. Sometimes she wondered why he specialized, now, on everything that was Empire and Georgian; but she wondered seldom. She knew very little about painting. If she wished anything, it was that he would show her less consideration and more passion, but then again she reminded herself that they had been married for five years, and he had, from the first, been remote. He would always be the same, and she would never, now, try to change him.

For nothing would cure his elusiveness.

"What a long time they are!" she thought again.

Once again she switched on the radio.

They were playing the 'Magic Flute.' Soon the Silver Drawing Room echoed with Mozart's music.

CHAPTER LIX

SIR DANIEL FOLLOWED his host into a ground-floor room with three large, curtained windows. This studio was a room rebuilt upon the site of the old morning-room where once Lady Rainsborough had so contemptuously dismissed her tutor. It contained a sofa and two shabby arm-chairs; there was a long, bare table set against the wall. The room was stacked with canvases. It looked austere, and was indeed the only room in Camelos devoid of beauty. A palette lay on the paint-stained table; a lay-figure reclined idiotically on a pile of draperies. Across one wall was pinned a row of anatomical drawings.

"Wait a minute," George said, after switching on the light.

Sir Daniel waited, obediently, lighting a cigarette. Although he had heard Herries talked of as a clever artist, it had never occurred to him to think of his ex-patient as anything more than a dilettante. That, he realized, glancing about him, was the fault of the boy's confounded money. He was a good judge of modern painting, being himself a modest collector, and he perceived immediately that Herries had talent.

He glanced at a rough, unfinished head—a man's head. An interesting face, he thought—dark, unshaven, lowering; a lean face with prominent cheek-bones, dissipated eyes, and a humorous, sensual mouth.

"I like that," he said.

George turned, busy at the other side of the room.

"Oh, that . . . it isn't finished. It's a portrait of a crook."

"A crook with charm."

"Oh, yes. He had charm, all right."

He struggled, as he spoke, with some canvases, at length

producing one which had been standing with its face to the wall.

"Here," he said, as though introducing a friend, "is Harriet . . ."

He turned the canvas.

Sir Daniel took off his spectacles, wiped them carefully, and replaced them upon his nose.

He looked into one of the most vivid faces he had ever seen. The girl lay carelessly upon a couch, against a darkly mysterious background, staring straight before her with an expression of mischievous, almost ironical daring. She wore a dress of lilac gauze, with cherry ribbons at her waist ; her dark, curling hair sprang away from her temples in grape-like tendrils. Her mouth seemed to smile, red, full-lipped, lovely ; her green eyes gazed out of the picture with a mockery in which there was also tenderness.

Sir Daniel said nothing.

He had been prepared for talent, but not for this portrait, which he knew to be remarkable. He supposed, looking at it, that the young man had a touch of genius. He knew, in any case, that there was a damnable cleverness in the painting of those green eyes into which he looked so deeply that he could not wrench his own away. He stared for some moments in silence. The girl stared back at him with so much vitality, audacity, and charm, that he found it difficult to believe she was not flesh and blood.

He said, slowly :

"So this . . . is Harriet !"

"Do you like the portrait ?"

"You'll exhibit it, of course ?"

"No. It'll never be seen outside the studio."

"But . . ."

"This is only for my friends to see."

"I believe I understand, although the world would call you foolish."

"Perhaps."

He lifted the picture, and placed it carefully upon the table,

facing them. It was then that Sir Daniel caught the gleam of a gold plaque attached to the frame. George followed his eyes.

"That only came down to-day, although I ordered it some time ago. I put it on myself before dinner."

Sir Daniel bent down to read :

'Lady Harriet Fane. B. 1792. D. 1813.'

He looked up, but Herries' face was expressionless.

"You found out——?"

"Yes. I told you. I had an expert on the job."

"She died? When——?"

He broke off, looking at the vivid face of Harriet Fane. Somehow he could not really believe that she had died.

George said calmly :

"Yes. A year afterwards. In Chelsea. The strange thing is, that knowing nothing of all this, I lived for some time in the same house. That was an odd coincidence, wasn't it? I always hated it—the house, I mean."

"You felt it was haunted by her?"

George shook his head, smiling. He had not once looked at the picture.

"It wasn't that," he said, "she's never haunted me, worse luck! I've prayed she might. No, it wasn't that. It was just that the house depressed me. I couldn't bear it. I suppose most houses where young people have died are sad, like that, for a long time afterwards. Anyhow, I got rid of it. It's an old story."

Sir Daniel, still looking at the portrait, asked :

"Do you know what she died of?"

"No." His voice was smooth. "No. I've no idea. I could never find out."

He picked up the portrait, carried it across the room and replaced it, gently, face turned towards the wall.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asked over his shoulder.

Sir Daniel pulled out his watch.

"Eleven. It's odd you should say that—I seem to remember a great clock here. I suppose I'm confusing your house with someone else's."

"You're not," George told him, "there is a clock here, but I had it stopped. It got on everyone's nerves."

He switched off the light.

"Let's find my wife."

Sir Daniel followed him down the passage. He wondered whether this young man knew that he had painted a portrait of genius. Somehow, he did not think so—Herries was too absorbed in his obsession for the past. A strange obsession! One not without charm, in view of his youthfulness, but scarcely likely to do him any good as he grew older, and became eccentric.

They reached the hall.

But, Sir Daniel reflected, with a curious feeling of certainty, trotting so as to keep step with that tall, swift figure, but Herries might not live to be old. There would be a war; he might be killed. He was in the Auxiliary Air Force. Then, as he thought this, he started, for, close to his ear, someone sighed. He stopped dead.

So did his host, but not for the same reason.

"Am I walking too fast?" George asked. He smiled; his face was candid, his eyes amused.

"Of course you're not!"

"It's a bad habit of mine!"

They fell into step. Sir Daniel said nothing. Then, as they passed across the hall towards the Silver Drawing Room, the doctor heard, unmistakably close beside them, the sound of a light, pattering footfall. It was a woman, of course; he could distinguish the rustle of a silken dress; he even caught the scent of her perfume. He felt cold, although the night was warm; he glanced sharply at his companion, and saw, by his peaceful face, that he had noticed nothing.

"Listen!" he said.

George stopped, looking surprised.

Sir Daniel was by no means lacking in self-possession. Although he knew—would have been prepared to swear—that they were not alone, he controlled himself, and said instead, hoping his voice was steady:

"This girl—you said she hadn't the courage to—to come back with you?"

"No. Why should she have? I hadn't the courage to stay behind with her!"

"As you've painted her, she looks as though she would be afraid of nothing. She has all the courage of the world in her eyes. That's what I can't understand."

"It's hopeless to understand, isn't it?" George said, with weariness. He did not want to talk about her any more. He felt as though he had purged himself of the past. Later, that night, when everyone had gone to bed, he would take out her portrait, and look at it alone; he would pray for her to return, even as a phantom, but she never would, and so that was hopeless, too.

"Come on!" he said, making his voice sound cheerful. He thought Sir Daniel looked tired.

He opened the door, and her footsteps stalked him, but he did not hear them; he shut her out.

They passed into the Silver Drawing Room.

"Have we been very long?" George asked Isabel. "If we have, you mustn't blame me!"

"Mozart!" Sir Daniel said with appreciation, drawing near the radio.

"Isn't it luck?" Isabel smiled, "I know you go to Glyndebourne whenever you can. . . ."

Sir Daniel sank into an arm-chair, listening to the music he so much loved. Isabel sat opposite to him, attentive and happy. George went over to the windows, staring outside. The long day was nearly over; the park was still, now; no longer bird-enchanted.

But Sir Daniel was unable that night to concentrate upon his favourite composer. No longer, since he had seen Harriet's portrait, could he think this husband and wife so happy as he had supposed. Closing his eyes, he saw, with a strange clearness, Harriet's eyes; he remembered, with discomfort, that sigh, those footsteps, that rustle of a silken dress.

He was sure, then, that he had been overworking; glad that

he was soon to take his holiday. He was as bad as—worse than—many of his patients ! Ghosts and sighs and footsteps—good God, how often had he prescribed for them !

He closed his eyes, succumbing at last to the spell of the music. A tragedy, he thought, for the hundredth time, that Salzburg was over and done with. . . .

He sat up, with a start, for the door was rattling. He glanced at Isabel, but her face was tranquil, as she listened to Mozart. He looked at George, but George's back was turned, and he still stared out into the garden.

Then, reluctantly, Sir Daniel glanced at the double doors through which they had entered a few minutes before.


He saw that the knob was turning, violently, as though shaken by an impatient hand. He watched, in silence.

He was sure that Harriet must be outside ; trying to come in, resentful of those who kept her from her lover. Why not, he thought ; she's been shut out for more than a hundred years . . . he knew then, that whatever Harriet lacked, it was not courage.

As he watched, the knob ceased to turn, and the door no longer rattled. She was gone, for she had failed. She could not make her lover listen. He wondered if she sighed again, as she went on her way, defeated, down the passage, and across the hall, out into some limbo, to wait, a tired ghost, for the time when she and he would be together always.

He no longer thought the night so warm ; he drew his chair close to the fire ; he was shivering.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
General Fiction	3-9	General	23
Historical Fiction	10	War and Politics	24-26
"First Novel" Library	10	Humour and Satire	27
Love and Romance	12, 13	Miscellaneous	28
Mystery and Thrills	14-16	Magnificent Limited Editions	29
Important Royal Biographies	17	Birds of Our Country	30
Biography and Memoirs	18-21	Pictorial History of the War	31
Travel	22	Universal Book Club	32

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Index of personalities in this list

	PAGE		PAGE		PAGE
ADAIR, HAZEL	9	FEUCHTWANGER,		MANNIN, ETHEL	32
AGATE, JAMES	28	LION	3, 32	McLAREN, JACK	39
ARDEN, CLIVE	12	FLEMING, RUTH	13	MENDELSSOHN, PETER	32
ARNOLD, MARGOT (Mrs.		FLOTSAM (B. C.		MORRISON, EMMELINE	5
MATTHEW ARNOLD)	7	HILLIAM)	11	MORRISON, MARGARET	9
BAERLEIN, HENRY	23	FÖLDES, JOLANDA	7	MOTTRAM, R. H.	4, 21
BAILLIE - SAUNDERS,		FÖLDI, MICHAEL	6	MUNDY, TALBOT	6
MARGARET	5	FRANKAU, GILBERT	5, 32	MUSKETT, NETTA	9
BAKER, AMY J.	12	FRASER-SIMSON, C.	8	NAYLOR, R. H.	28
BARRINGTON,		GIBBS, Sir PHILIP	4, 31, 32	NEWMAN, BERNARD	26
SIR JONAH	27	GOLDING, LOUIS	3, 22	NORSWORTHY, GEORGE	16
BARTLETT, VERNON	31	GRAEME, BRUCE	14	O'MORE, PEGGY	16
BAX, EMILY	18	GRAHAM, STEPHEN	26	PARRISH, MAUD	22
BAXTER, A. BEVERLEY	26	GRAINGER, ELLA	28	PATRICK, DIANA	6
BEACH, REX	9	GRINSTEAD, J. E.	16	PINK, HAL	15
BEITH, MAJ.-GEN. J. H.		GUITRY, SACHA	27	POLLARD, CAPT. A. O.	16
(IAN HAY)	31	HALIFAX, Rt. Hon.		PURSEY, COMMANDER H.	25
BENTLEY, JOHN	15	Viscount	31	QUEEN ALEXANDRA	17
BERESFORD, J. D.	4	HALKETT, J. G. HAY	19	QUEEN ELIZABETH	31
BOILEAU, ETHEL	3	HALPIN, WARREN T.	29	QUEEN GERALDINE	
BORODIN, GEORGE	21	HAW-HAW OF ZEESEN	27	AND KING ZOG	17
BOWEN, MARJORIE	10	HAY, IAN	31	REMARQUE, ERICH	
BROWNE, DOUGLAS G.		HENDERSON, Rt. Hon.		MARIA	3
	14, 21	Sir NEVILLE	31	RHODES, KATHLYN	13
BURGESS, LESLIE	8	HERRIOT, EDOUARD	24	ROBY, ADELAIDE Q.	8
BURTON, RICHARD	28	HERRY-PERRY	27	RYLAND, CLIVE	14
CADDICK, ARTHUR	6	HEYGATE, JOHN	25	SABATINI, RAFAEL	10, 32
CAMPBELL, Admiral		HILLIAM, B. C.	11	SANCIER, DULCIE	8
GORDON, v.c.	28, 31	HORE-BELISHA, Rt.		SARASIN, J. G.	10
CARFRAE, ELIZABETH	13	Hon. LESLIE	31	SAVI, E. W.	7
CARR, ALBERT	20	HORNBY, CLIFFORD	20	SCHALDACH, WILLIAM	
CARR, WILLIAM GUY	24, 32	HOVEN, BARONESS		J.	29
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